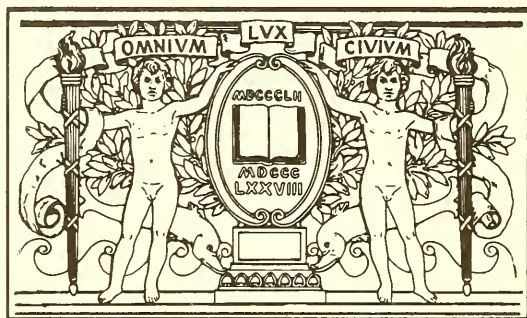


GRIT, *the* YOUNG BOATMAN



HORATIO ALGER JR.



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GRIT, THE YOUNG BOATMAN

BY

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"BOUND TO RISE," "BRAVE AND BOLD," "RISEN FROM
THE RANKS," "JULIUS, THE STREET BOY,"
ETC., ETC.

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GRIT

The Young Boatman of Pine Point

CHAPTER I

GRIT

"GRIT!"

"Well, mother, what is it?"

The speaker was a sturdy, thick-set boy of fifteen, rather short for his age, but strongly made. His eyes were clear and bright, his expression was pleasant, and his face attractive, but even a superficial observer could read in it unusual firmness and strength of will. He was evidently a boy whom it would not be easy to subdue or frighten. He was sure to make his way in the world and maintain his rights against all aggression. It was the general recognition of this trait which had led to the nickname, "Grit," by which he was generally known. His real name was Harry Morris, but even his mother had fallen into the habit of calling him

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Grit, and his own name actually sounded strange to him.

"Well, mother, what is it?" he asked again, as his mother continued to look at him in silence, with an expression of trouble on her face.

"I had a letter this morning, Grit."

"From—*him*?"

"Yes, from your father."

"Don't call him my father!" said the boy hastily.

"He isn't my father."

"He is your stepfather—and my husband," said Mrs. Morris, soberly.

"Yes, worse luck for you! Well, what does he say?"

"He's coming home."

An expression of dismay quickly gathered on the boy's face.

"How can that be? His term isn't out."

"It is shortened by good behavior, and so he comes out four months before his sentence would have expired."

"I wouldn't have him here, mother," said Grit earnestly. "He will only worry and trouble you. We are getting on comfortably now without him."

"Yes, thanks to my good, industrious boy."

"Oh, don't talk about that," said Grit, who always felt embarrassed when openly praised.

"But it is true, Grit. But for the money you

make in your boat I might have to go to the poor-house."

"You will never go while I live, mother," said Grit, quickly.

"No, Grit, I feel sure of that. It seems wicked to rejoice in your father's misfortune and disgrace——"

"Not my father," interrupted Grit.

"Mr. Brandon, then. As I was saying, it seems wicked to feel relieved by his imprisonment, but I can't help it."

"Why should you try to help it? He has made you a bad husband and only brought you unhappiness. How did you ever come to marry him, mother?"

"I did it for the best, as I thought Grit. I was left a widow when you were four years old. I had this cottage, to be sure, and about two thousand dollars, but the interest of that sum at six per cent. only amounted to a hundred and twenty dollars, and I was not brave and self-reliant, like some; so when Mr. Brandon asked me to marry him I did so, thinking that he would give us a good home, be a father to you, and save us from all pecuniary care or anxiety."

"You were pretty soon undeceived, mother."

"No, not soon. Your stepfather had a good mercantile position in Boston, and we occupied a com-

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fortable cottage in Newton. For some years all went well, but then I began to see a change for the worse in him. He became fond of drink, was no longer attentive to business, picked up bad associates, and eventually lost his position. This was when you were ten years of age. Then he took possession of my little capital and went into business for himself. But his old habits clung to him, and of course there was small chance of success. He kept up for about a year, however, and then he failed, and the creditors took everything——”

“Except this house, mother.”

“Yes, this house was fortunately settled upon me, so that my husband could not get hold of it. When we were turned out of our home in Newton it proved a welcome refuge for us. It was small, plain, humble, but still it gave us a home.”

“It has been a happy home, mother—that is, ever since Mr. Brandon left us.”

“Yes; we have lived plainly, but I have had you, and you have always been a comfort to me. You were always a good boy, Grit.”

“I’m not quite an angel, mother. Ask Phil Courtney what he thinks about it,” said Grit, smiling.

“He is a bad, disagreeable boy,” said Mrs. Brandon, warmly.

“So I think, mother; but Phil, on the other hand,

thinks I am a low, vulgar boy, unworthy of associating with him."

"I don't want you to associate with him, Grit."

"I don't care to, mother; but we are getting away from the subject. How did Mr. Brandon behave after you moved here?"

"He did nothing to earn money, but managed to obtain liquor at the tavern, and sometimes went off for three or four days or a week, leaving me in ignorance of his whereabouts. At last he did not come back at all, and I heard that he had been arrested for forgery and was on trial. The trial was quickly over, and he was sentenced to imprisonment for a term of years. I saw him before he was carried to prison, but he treated me so rudely that I have not felt it my duty to visit him since. Gradually I resumed your father's name, and I have been known as Mrs. Morris, though my legal name, of course, is Brandon."

"It is a pity you ever took the name, mother," said Grit, hastily.

"I agree with you, Grit; but I cannot undo the past."

"The court ought to grant you a divorce from such a man."

"Perhaps I might obtain one, but it would cost money, and we have no money to spend on such things."

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"If you had one," said Grit, thoughtfully, "Mr. Brandon would no longer have any claim upon you."

"That is true."

"You said you had a letter from him. When did you receive it?"

"While you were out this morning. Mr. Wheeler saw it in the post-office, and brought it along, thinking we might not have occasion to call."

"May I see the letter, mother?"

"Certainly, Grit; I have no secrets from you."

Mrs. Morris—to call her by the name she preferred—took from the pocket of her dress a letter in a yellow envelope, which, however, was directed in a neat, clerky hand, for Mr. Brandon had been carefully prepared for mercantile life, and had once been a bookkeeper, and wrote a handsome, flowing hand.

"Here it is, Grit."

Grit opened the letter, and read as follows:

" '——— PRISON, May 10.

" 'MY AFFECTIONATE WIFE: I have no doubt you will be overjoyed to hear that my long imprisonment is nearly over, and that on the fifteenth, probably, I shall be set free, and can leave these cursed walls behind me. Of course, I shall lose no time in seeking out my loving wife, who has not

deigned for years to remember that she has a husband. You might at least have called now and then, to show some interest in me.'

"Why should you?" ejaculated Grit indignantly. "He has only illtreated you, spent your money, and made you unhappy."

"You think, then, I was right in staying away, Grit?" asked his mother.

"Certainly I do. You don't pretend to love him?"

"No, I only married him at his urgent request, thinking I was doing what was best for you. It was a bad day's work for me. I could have got along much better alone."

"Of course you could, mother. Well, I will read the rest:

"'However, you are my wife still, and owe me some reparation for your long neglect. I shall come to Pine Point as soon as I can, and it is hardly necessary to remind you that I shall be out of money, and shall want you to stir round and get me some, as I shall want to buy some clothes and other things.'

"How does he think you are to supply him with money, when he has left you to take care of your-

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self all these years?" against burst from Grit's indignant lips.

He read on:

" 'How is the cub? Is he as independent and saucy as ever? I am afraid you have allowed him to do as he pleases. He needs a man's hand to hold him in check and train him up properly.' "

"Heaven help you if Mr. Brandon is to have the training of you, Grit!" exclaimed his mother.

"He'll have a tough job if he tries it!" said Grit. "He'll find me rather larger and stronger than when he went to prison."

"Don't get into any conflict with him, Grit," said his mother, a new alarm seizing her.

"I won't if I can help it, mother; but I don't mean to have him impose upon me."

CHAPTER II

THE YOUNG BOATMAN

PINE POINT was situated on the Kennebec River, and from its height overlooked it, so that a person standing on its crest could scan the river for a considerable distance up and down. There was a small grove of pine-trees at a little distance, and this had given the point its name. A hundred feet from the brink stood the old-fashioned cottage occupied by Mrs. Morris. It had belonged, in a former generation, to an uncle of hers, who, dying unmarried, had bequeathed it to her. Perhaps half an acre was attached to it. There had been more, but it had been sold off.

When Grit and his mother came to Chester to live—it was in this township that Pine Point was situated—she had but little of her two thousand dollars remaining, and when her husband was called to expiate his offense against the law in prison, there were but ten dollars in the house. Mrs. Morris was fortunate enough to secure a

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boarder, whose board-money paid nearly all their small household expenses for three years, the remainder being earned by her own skill as a dress-maker; but when the boarder went to California, never to return, Grit was already thirteen years old, and hit upon a way of earning money.

On the opposite bank of the Kennebec was the village of Portville, but there was no bridge at that point. So Grit bought a boat for a few dollars, agreeing to pay for it in instalments, and established a private ferry between the two places. His ordinary charge for rowing a passenger across—the distance being half a mile—was ten cents; but if it were a child, or a poor person, he was willing to receive five, and he took parties of four at a reduction.

It was an idea of his own, but it paid. Grit himself was rather surprised at the number of persons who availed themselves of his ferry. Sometimes he found at the end of the day that he had received in fares over a dollar, and one Fourth of July, when there was a special celebration in Portville, he actually made three dollars. Of course, he had to work pretty hard for it, but the young boatman's arms were strong, as was shown by his sturdy stroke.

Grit was now fifteen, and he could reflect with pride that for two years he had been able to sup-

port his mother in a comfortable manner, so that she had wanted for nothing—that is, for nothing that could be classed as a comfort. Luxuries he had not been able to supply, but for them neither he nor his mother cared. They were content with their plain way of living.

But if his stepfather were coming home, Grit felt that his income would no longer be adequate to maintain the household. Mr. Brandon ought to increase the family income, but, knowing what he and his mother did of his ways, he built no hope upon that. It looked as if their quiet home happiness was likely to be rudely broken in upon by the threatened invasion.

"Well, mother," said Grit, "I must get to work."

"You haven't finished your dinner, my son."

"Your news has spoiled my appetite, mother. However, I dare say I'll make up for it at supper."

"I'll save a piece of meat for you to eat then. You work so hard that you need meat to keep up your strength."

"I haven't had to work much this morning, mother, worse luck! I only earned twenty cents. People don't seem inclined to travel to-day."

"Never mind, Grit. I've got five dollars in the house."

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"Save it for a rainy day, mother. The day is only half over, and I may have good luck this afternoon."

As Grit left the house with his quick, firm step, Mrs. Morris looked after him with blended affection and pride.

"What a good boy he is!" she said to herself. "He is a boy that any mother might be proud of."

And so he was. Our young hero was not only a strong, manly boy, but there was something very attractive in his clear eyes and frank smile, browned though his skin was by constant exposure to the sun and wind. He was a general favorite in the town, or, rather, in the two towns, for he was as well known in Portville as he was in Chester.

I have said he was a general favorite, but there was one at least who disliked him. This was Phil Courtney, a boy about his own age, the son of an ex-president of the Chester bank, a boy who considered himself of great consequence, and socially far above the young boatman. He lived in a handsome house, and had a good supply of pocket-money, though he was always grumbling about his small allowance. It by no means follows that money makes a boy a snob, but if he has any tendency that way, it is likely to show itself under such circumstances.

Now, it happened that Phil had a cousin staying

at his house as a visitor, quite a pretty girl, in whose eyes he liked to appear to advantage. As Grit reached the shore, where he had tied his boat, they were seen approaching the same point.

"I wonder if Phil is going to favor me with his patronage," thought Grit, as his eyes fell upon them.

"Here, you boatman!" called out Phil, in a tone of authority. "We want to go over to Portville."

Grit's eyes danced with merriment, as he answered gravely:

"I have no objection to your going."

The girl laughed merrily, but Phil frowned, for his dignity was wounded by Grit's flippancy.

"I am not in the habit of considering whether you have any objection or not," he said haughtily.

"Don't be a goose, Phil!" said his cousin. "The boy is in fun."

"I would rather he would not make fun of me," said Phil.

"I won't, then," said Grit, smiling.

"Ahem! you may convey us across," said Phil.

"If you please," added the young lady, with a smile.

"She is very good-looking, and five times as polite as Phil," thought Grit, fixing his eyes admiringly upon the pretty face of Marion Clarke, as he afterward learned her name to be.

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"I shall be glad to have you as a passenger," said our hero, but he looked at Marion, not at Phil.

"Thank you."

"If you've got through with your compliments," said Phil impatiently, "we'd better start."

"I am ready," said Grit. "May I help you in?" he asked of Marion.

"Yes, thank you."

"It is quite unnecessary. I can assist you," said Phil, advancing.

But he was too late, for Marion had already availed herself of the young boatman's proffered aid.

"Thank you," said Marion again, pleasantly, as she took her seat in the stern.

"Why didn't you wait for me?" demanded Phil crossly, as he took his seat beside her.

"I didn't want to be always troubling you, Cousin Phil," said Marion, with a coquettish glance at Grit, which her cousin did not at all relish.

"Don't notice him so much," he said, in a low voice. "He's only a poor boatman."

"He is very good-looking, I think," said Marion.

Grit's back was turned, but he heard both question and answer, and his cheeks glowed with pleasure at the young lady's speech, though it was answered by a contemptuous sniff from Phil.

"I don't admire your taste, Marion," he said.

"Hush, he'll hear you," she whispered. "What's his name?"

By way of answering, Phil addressed Grit in a condescending tone.

"Well, Grit, how is business to-day?"

"Rather quiet, thank you."

"You see, he earns his living by boating," explained Phil, with the manner of one who was speaking of a very inferior person.

"How much have you earned now?" he asked further.

"Only twenty cents," answered Grit; "but I suppose," he added, smiling, "I suppose you intend to pay me liberally."

"I mean to pay you your regular fare," said Phil, who was not of a liberal disposition.

"Thank you; I ask no more."

"Do you row across often?" asked Marion.

"Sometimes I make eight or ten trips in a day. On the Fourth of July I went fifteen times."

"How strong you must be!"

"Pooh! I could do more than that," said Phil loftily, unwilling that Grit should be admired for anything.

"Oh, I know you're remarkable," said his cousin dryly.

Just then the wind, which was unusually strong, took Phil's hat, and it blew off to a considerable distance.

"My hat's off!" exclaimed Phil, in excitement. "Row after it, quick. It's a new Panama, and cost ten dollars."

CHAPTER III

THE LOST HAT

GRIT complied with the request of his passenger, and rowed after Phil's hat. But there was a strong current, and it was not without considerable trouble that he at last secured it. But, alas! the new hat, with its bright ribbon, was well soaked when it was fished out of the water.

"It's mean," ejaculated Phil, lifting it with an air of disgust. "Just my luck."

"Are you so unlucky, then?" asked his cousin Marion, with a half smile.

"I should say so. What do you call this?"

"A wet hat."

"How am I ever to wear it? It will drip all over my clothes."

"I think you had better buy a common one in Portville, and leave this one here to dry."

"How am I going round Portville bare-headed?" inquired Phil crossly.

"Shall I lend you my hat?" asked Marion.

"Wouldn't I look like a fool, going round the streets with a girl's hat on?"

"Well, you are the best judge of that," answered Marion demurely.

Grit laughed, as the young lady glanced at him with a smile.

"What are you laughing at, you boatman?" snarled Phil.

"I beg your pardon," said Grit good-naturedly; "I know it must be provoking to have your hat wet. Can I help you in any way? If you will give me the money, and remain in the boat, I will run up to Davis, the hatter's, and get you a new hat."

"How can you tell my size?" asked Phil, making no acknowledgment for the offer.

"Then I will lend you my hat to go up yourself."

Phil's lip curled, as if he considered that there would be contamination in such a plebeian hat. However, as Marion declared it would be the best thing to do, he suppressed his disdain, and, without a word of thanks, put Grit's hat on his head.

"Come with me, Marion," he said.

"No, Phil; I will remain here with Mr. —," and she turned inquiringly toward the young boatman.

"Grit," he suggested.

"Mr. Grit," she said, finishing the sentence.

"Just as you like. I admire your taste," said Phil, with a sneer.

As he walked away, Marion turned to the young boatman.

"Is your name really Grit?" she asked.

"No; people call me so."

"I can understand why," she answered, with a smile. "You look—gritty."

"If I do, I hope it isn't anything disagreeable," responded our hero.

"Oh, no," said Marion; "quite the contrary. I like to see boys that won't allow themselves to be imposed upon."

"I don't generally allow myself to be imposed upon."

"What is your real name?"

"Harry Morris."

"I suppose you and Phil know each other very well?"

"We have known each other a long time, but we are not very intimate friends."

"I don't think Phil has any intimate friends," said Marion thoughtfully. "He—I don't think he gets on very well with the other boys."

"He wants to boss them," said Grit bluntly.

"Yes; I expect that is it. He's my cousin, you know."

"Is he? I don't think you are much alike."

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"Is that remark a compliment to me—or him?" asked Marion, laughing.

"To you, decidedly."

"Well, Phil can be very disagreeable when he sets out to be. I should not want to be that, you know."

"You couldn't," said Grit, with an admiring glance.

"That's a compliment," said Marion. "But you're mistaken. I can be disagreeable when I set out to be. I expect Phil finds me so sometimes."

"I wouldn't."

"You know how to flatter as well as to row, Mr. Grit. It's true. I tease Phil awfully sometimes."

By this time Phil came back with a new hat on his head, holding Grit's in the tips of his fingers, as if it would contaminate him. He pitched it into Grit's lap, saying shortly:

"There's your hat."

"Upon my word, Phil, you're polite," said his cousin. "Can't you thank Mr. Grit?"

"Mr. Grit!" repeated Phil contemptuously. "Of course I thank him."

"You're quite welcome," answered Grit dryly.

"Here's your fare!" said Phil, taking out two dimes, and offering them to the young boatman.

"Thank you."

"Phil, you ought to pay something extra for the loan of the hat," said Marion, "and the delay."

With evident reluctance Phil took a nickel from his vest pocket, and offered it to Grit.

"No, thank you!" said Grit, drawing back, "I wouldn't be willing to take anything for that. I've found it very agreeable to wait," and he glanced significantly at Marion.

"I suppose I am to consider that another compliment," said the young lady, with a coquettish glance.

"What, has he been complimenting you?" asked Phil jealously.

"Yes, and it was very agreeable, as I got no compliments from you. Good afternoon, Mr. Grit. I hope you will row us back by and by."

"I hope so, too," said the young boatman, bowing.

"Look here, Marion," said Phil, as they walked away, "you take altogether too much notice of that fellow."

"Why do I? I am sure he is a very nice boy."

"He is a common working boy!" snapped Phil. "He lives with his mother in a poor hut upon the bluff, and makes his living by boating."

"I am sure that is to his credit."

"Oh, yes, I suppose it is. So's a ditch-digger

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engaged in a creditable employment, but you don't treat him as an equal."

"I should be willing to treat Grit as an equal. He is very good-looking, don't you think so, Phil?"

"Good-looking! So is a cow good-looking."

"I've seen some cows that were very good-looking," answered Marion, with a mischievous smile. "I suppose Grit and you are well acquainted?"

"Oh, I know him to speak to him," returned Phil loftily. "Of course, I couldn't be intimate with such a boy."

"I was thinking," said Marion, "it would be nice to invite him round to the house to play croquet with us."

"Invite Grit Morris?" gasped Phil.

"Yes, why not?"

"A boy like him!"

"Why, wouldn't he behave well?"

"Oh, I suppose he would, but he isn't in our circle."

"Then it's a pity he isn't. He's the most agreeable boy I have met in Chester."

"You say that only to provoke me."

"No I don't. I mean it."

"I won't invite him," said Phil doggedly. "I am surprised that you should think of such a thing."

"Propriety, Miss Marion, propriety!" said the young lady, in a tone of mock dignity, turning up the whites of her eyes. "That's just the way my governess used to talk. It's well I've got so experienced a young gentleman to look after me, and see that I don't stumble into any impropriety."

Meanwhile, Grit sat in his boat, waiting for a return passenger, and as he waited he thought of the young lady he had just ferried over.

"I can't see how such a fellow as Phil Courtney can have such a nice cousin," he said to himself. "She's very pretty, too! She isn't stuck-up, like him. I hope I shall get the chance of rowing them back."

He waited about ten minutes, when he saw a gentleman and a little boy approaching the river.

"Are you the ferry-boy?" asked the gentleman.

"Yes, sir."

"I heard there was a boy who would row me across. I want to go to Chester with my little boy. Can you take us over?"

"Yes, sir; I shall be happy to do so."

"Are you ready to start?"

"Yes, sir, just as soon as you get into the boat."

"Come, Willie," said the gentleman, addressing his little boy, "won't you like to ride over in the boat?"

"Oh, yes, papa," answered Willie eagerly.

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"I hope you are well acquainted with rowing, and careful," said Mr. Jackson, for this was his name. "I am rather timid about the water, for I can't swim."

"Yes, sir, I am as much at home on the water as on the land. I've been rowing every day for the last three years."

The gentleman and his little boy sat down, and Grit bent to his oars.

CHAPTER IV

A BOY IN THE WATER

MR. JACKSON was a slender, dark-complexioned man of forty, or thereabouts. He was fashionably dressed, and had the air of one who lives in a city. He had an affable manner, and seemed inclined to be social.

"Is this your business, ferrying passengers across the river?" he asked of Grit.

"Yes, sir," answered the young boatman.

"Does it pay?" was the next inquiry—an important one in the eyes of a city man.

"Yes, sir; I make more in this way than I could in any other."

"How much, for instance?"

"From five to seven dollars. Once—it was Fourth of July week—I made nearly ten dollars."

"That is a great deal more than I made at your age," said Mr. Jackson.

"You look as if you made more now," said Grit, smiling.

"Yes," said the passenger, with an answering

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smile. "I am afraid I couldn't get along on that sum now."

"Do you live in the city?" asked Grit, with a sudden impulse.

"Yes, I live in what I regard as *the* city. I mean New York."

"It must be a fine place," said the young boatman thoughtfully.

"Yes, it is a fine place, if you have money enough to live handsomely. Did you ever hear of Wall Street?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am a Wall Street broker. I commenced as a boy in a broker's office. I don't think I was any better off than you at your age—certainly I did not earn so much money."

"But you didn't have a mother to take care of, did you, sir?"

"No; do you?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are a good boy to work for your mother. My poor boy has no mother;" and the gentleman looked sad. "What is your name?"

"Grit."

"Is that your real name?"

"No, sir, but everybody calls me so."

"For a good reason, probably. Willie, do you like to ride in the boat?"

"Yes, papa," answered the little boy, his bright eyes and eager manner showing that he spoke the truth.

"Grit," said Mr. Jackson, "I see we are nearly across the river. Unless you are due there at a specified time, you may stay out, and we will row here and there, prolonging our trip. Of course, I will increase your pay."

"I shall be very willing, sir," said Grit. "My boat is my own, and my time also, and I have no fixed hours for starting from either side."

"Good! Then we can continue our conversation. Is there a good hotel in Chester?"

"Quite a good one, sir. They keep summer boarders."

"That was the point I wished to inquire about. Willie and I have been staying with friends in Portville, but they are expecting other visitors, and I have a fancy for staying awhile on your side of the river—that is, if you live in Chester."

"Yes, sir; our cottage is on yonder bluff—Pine Point, it is called."

"Then I think I will call at the hotel, and see whether I can obtain satisfactory accommodations."

"Are you taking a vacation?" asked Grit, with curiosity.

"Yes; the summer is a dull time in Wall Street,

and my partner attends to everything. By and by I shall return, and give him a chance to go away."

"Do people make a great deal of money in Wall Street?" asked Grit.

"Sometimes, and sometimes they lose a great deal. I have known a man who kept his span of horses one summer reduced to accept a small clerkship the next. If a broker does not speculate, he is not so liable to such changes of fortune. What is your real name, since Grit is only a nickname?"

"My real name is Harry Morris."

"Have you any brothers or sisters?"

"No, sir; I am an only child."

"Were you born here?"

"No, sir; I was born in Boston."

"Have you formed any plans for the future? You won't be a boatman all your life, I presume?"

"I hope not, sir. It will do well enough for the present, and I am glad to have such a chance of earning a living for my mother and myself; but when I grow up I should like to go to the city, and get into business there."

"All the country boys are anxious to seek their fortune in the city. In many cases they would do better to stay at home."

"Were you born in the city, sir?" asked Grit shrewdly.

"No; I was born in the country."

"But you didn't stay there."

"No; you have got me there. I suppose it was better for me to go to the city, and perhaps it may be for you; but there is no hurry. You wouldn't have a chance to earn six dollars a week in the city, as you say you do here. Besides, it would cost much more for you and your mother to live."

"I suppose so, sir. I am contented to remain where I am at present."

"Is your father dead?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is a great loss. Then your mother is a widow?"

"I wish she were," said Grit hastily.

"But she must be, if your father is dead," said Mr. Jackson.

"No, sir; she married again."

"Oh, there is a stepfather, then? Don't you and he get along well together?"

"There has been no chance to quarrel for nearly five years."

"Why?"

"Because he has been in prison."

"Excuse me if I have forced upon you a disagreeable topic," said the passenger, in a tone of sympathy. "His term of confinement will expire, and then he can return to you."

"That is just what troubles me, sir," said Grit

bluntly. "We are expecting him in a day or two, and then our quiet life will be at an end."

"Will he make things disagreeable for you?"

"Yes, sir."

"At least, you will not have to work so hard."

"Yes, sir. I shall have to work harder, for I shall have to support him, too."

"Won't he be willing to work?"

"No, sir, he is very lazy, and if he can live without work, he will."

"That is certainly unfortunate."

"It is worse than having no father at all," said Grit bluntly. "I don't care to have him remain in prison, if he will only keep away from us, but I should be glad if I could never set eyes upon him again."

"Well, my boy, you must bear the trial as well as you can. We all have our trials, and yours comes in the shape of a disagreeable step-father——"

He did not finish the sentence, for there was a startling interruption.

Mr. Jackson and Grit had been so much engaged in their conversation that they had not watched the little boy. Willie had amused himself in bending over the side of the boat, and dipping his little fingers in the rippling water. With childish

imprudence he leaned too far, and fell head first into the swift stream.

A splash told the startled father what had happened.

"Good Heaven!" he exclaimed, "my boy is overboard, and I cannot swim."

He had scarcely got the words out of his mouth than Grit was in the water, swimming for the spot where the boy went down, now a rod or two distant, for the boat had been borne onward by the impulse of the oars.

The young boatman was an expert swimmer. It would naturally have been expected, since so much of his time had been spent on the river. He had often engaged in swimming-matches with his boy companions, and there was no one who could surpass him in speed or endurance.

He struck out boldly, and, as Willie rose to the surface for the second time, he seized him by the arm, and, turning, struck out for the boat. The little boy struggled, and this made his task more difficult, but Grit was strong and wary, and, holding Willie in a strong grip, he soon gained the boat.

Mr. Jackson leaned over, and drew the boy, dripping, into its safe refuge.

"Climb in, too, Grit!" he said.

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"No, I shall upset it. If you will row to the shore, I will swim there."

"Very well."

Mr. Jackson was not wholly a stranger to the use of oars, and the shore was very near. In three minutes the boat touched the bank, and almost at the same time Grit clambered on shore.

"You have saved my boy's life," said Mr. Jackson, his voice betraying the strong emotion he felt. "I shall not forget it."

"Willie is cold!" said the little boy.

"Our house is close by," said Grit. "Let us take him there at once, and mother will take care of him, and dry his clothes."

The suggestion was adopted, and Mr. Jackson and his two young companions were soon standing at the door of the plain cottage on the bluff.

When his mother admitted them, Grit noticed that she looked disturbed, and he seized the first chance to ask her if anything were the matter.

"Your stepfather has come!" she answered.

CHAPTER V

THE STEPFATHER

GRIT was disagreeably surprised at the news of Mr. Brandon's arrival, and he looked about him in the expectation of seeing his unwelcome figure, in vain.

"Where is he, mother?" the boy inquired.

"Gone to the tavern," she answered significantly.

"Did you give him any money?"

"I gave him a dollar," she replied sadly. "It is easy to tell how it will be spent."

Grit had no time to inquire further at that time, for he was assisting his mother in necessary attentions to their guests, having hurriedly exchanged his own wet clothes for dry ones.

Mr. Jackson seemed very grateful to Mrs. Morris for her attention to Willie. She found an old suit of Grit's, worn by him at the age of eight, and dressed Willie in it, while his own wet suit was being dried. The little boy presented a comical spec-

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tacle, the suit being three or four sizes too large for him.

"I don't like it," he said. "It is too big."

"So it is, Willie," said his father; "but you won't have to wear it long. You would catch your death of cold if you wore your wet clothes. How long will it take to dry his clothes, Mrs. Morris?"

"Two or three hours at least," answered the widow.

"I have a great mind to go back to Portville, and get a change of garments," said the father.

"That would be the best thing, probably."

"But I should have to burden you with Willie; for I should need to take Grit with me to ferry me across."

"It will be no trouble, sir. I will take good care of him."

"Willie, will you stay here while I go after your other clothes?" asked Mr. Jackson.

Willie readily consented, especially after Grit had brought him a picture-book to look over. Then he accompanied the father to the river, and they started to go across. While they were gone, Mr. Brandon returned to the cottage. His flushed face and unsteady gait showed that he had been drinking. He lifted the latch, and went in.

When he saw Willie sitting in a small chair beside his wife, he gazed at the child in astonishment.

"Is that the cub?" he asked doubtfully. "Seems to me he's grown smaller since I saw him."

"I ain't a cub," said Willie indignantly.

"Oh, yer ain't a cub, hey?" repeated Brandon mockingly.

"No, I ain't. My name is Willie Jackson, and my papa lives in New York."

"What is the meaning of this, Mrs. Brandon?" asked the inebriate. "Where did you pick up this youngster?"

His wife explained in a few words.

"I thought it wasn't the cub," said Mr. Brandon indistinctly. "Where is he?"

"He has gone to row Mr. Jackson over to Portville."

"I say, Mrs. B., does he earn much money that way?"

"He earns all the money that supports us," answered his wife coldly.

"I must see to that," said Brandon unsteadily. "He must bring me his money every night—do you hear, Mrs. B.?—must bring me his money every night."

"To spend for liquor, I suppose?" she responded bitterly.

"I'm a gentleman. My money—that is, his money is my money. D'ye understand?"

"I understand only too well, Mr. Brandon."

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"That's all right. I feel tired. Guess I'll go and lie down."

To his wife's relief he went up-stairs, and was soon stretched out on the bed in a drunken sleep.

"I am glad he is out of the way. I should be ashamed to have Mr. Jackson see him," thought Grit's mother, or Mrs. Brandon, as we must now call her.

"Who is that man?" asked Willie anxiously.

"His name is Brandon," answered Grit's mother.

"He isn't a nice man. I don't like him."

Mrs. Brandon said nothing. What could she say? If she had spoken as she felt, she would have been compelled to agree with the boy. Yet this man was her husband, and was likely to be to her a daily source of anxiety and annoyance.

"I am afraid Grit and he won't agree," she thought anxiously. "Oh! why did he ever come back? For the last five years we have been happy. We have lived plainly and humbly, but our home has been peaceful. Now, Heaven knows what trouble is in store for us."

Half an hour later Mr. Jackson and Grit returned.

CHAPTER VI

GRIT'S RECOMPENSE

NO TIME was lost in arraying Willie in clothes more suitable for him. The little boy was glad to lay aside Grit's old suit, which certainly was not very becoming to him.

"Are we going now, papa?" asked the little boy.

"Yes, Willie; but first I must express to this good lady my great thanks for her kindness."

"I have done but little, sir," said Mrs. Brandon; "but that little I was very glad to do."

"I am sure of that," said the visitor cordially.

"If you remain in the neighborhood, I shall hope to see your little boy again, and yourself, also."

"I will come," said Willie promptly.

"He answers for himself," said his father, smiling, "and he will keep his promise. Now, Grit," he said, turning to the young boatman, "I will ask you to accompany me to the hotel."

"Certainly, sir."

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When they had passed from the cottage, Mr. Jackson turned to the boy and grasped his hand.

"I have not yet expressed to you my obligations," he said, with emotion, "for the great service you have done me—the greatest in the power of any man, or boy."

"Don't speak of it, sir," said Grit modestly.

"But I must. You have saved the life of my darling boy."

"I don't know, sir."

"But I do. I cannot swim a stroke, and but for your prompt bravery, he would have drowned before my eyes."

Grit could not well contradict this statement, for it was incontestably true.

"It was lucky I could swim," he answered.

"Yes, it was. It seems providential that I should have had with me so brave a boy, when Willie's life was in peril. It will be something that you will remember with satisfaction to the end of your own life."

"Yes, sir, there is no doubt of that," answered Grit sincerely.

"I shudder to think what a sad blank my own life would have been if I had lost my dear boy. He is my only child, and for this reason I should have missed him the more. Your brave act is one that I cannot fitly reward——"

"I don't need any reward, Mr. Jackson," said Grit hastily.

"I am sure you do not. You do not look like a mercenary boy. But, for all that, I owe it to myself to see that so great a favor does not go unacknowledged. My brave boy, accept this wallet and what it contains, not as the payment of a debt, but as the first in the series of my acknowledgments to you."

As he spoke, he put into the hand of the young boatman a wallet.

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Jackson," said Grit, "but I am not sure that I ought to take this."

"Then let me decide for you," said the broker, smiling. "I am older, and may be presumed to have more judgment."

"It will seem as if I took pay for saving Willie from drowning."

"If you did, it would be perfectly proper. But you forget that I have had the use of your boat and your own services for the greater part of the afternoon."

"I presume you have paid me more than I ask for such services."

"Very likely," answered Mr. Jackson. "In fact, outside of my obligations to you, I have formed a good opinion of a boy who works hard and faith-

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fully to support his mother. I was a poor boy once, and I have not forgotten how to sympathize with those who are beginning the conflict with narrow means. Mind, Grit, I don't condole with you. You have good health and strong hands, and in our favored country there is no reason why, when you reach my age, you may not be equally well off."

"I wish I might—for mother's sake," said Grit, his face lighting up with hope.

"I shall see more of you while I am here, but I may as well say now that I mean to bear you in mind, and wish you to come to me, either here or in the city, when you stand in need of advice or assistance."

Grit expressed his gratitude. Mr. Jackson selected a room at the hotel, and promised to take up his quarters there the next day. Then Grit once more took up his oars and ferried Willie and his father across the river.

It was not for some time, therefore, that he had a chance to examine the wallet which had been given him.

CHAPTER VII

GRIT ASTONISHES PHIL

GRIT was not wholly without curiosity, and, as was natural, he speculated as to the amount which the wallet contained. When Mr. Jackson and Willie had left him, he took it out of his pocket and opened it.

He extracted a roll of bills and counted them over. There were ten five-dollar bills, and ten dollars in notes of a smaller denomination.

"Sixty dollars!" ejaculated Grit, with a thrill of pleasure. "I never was so rich in all my life."

He felt that the sum was too large for him to accept, and he was half tempted to run after Mr. Jackson and say so. But quick reflection satisfied him that the generous New Yorker wished him to retain it, and, modest though he was, he was conscious that in saving the little boy's life he had placed his passenger under an obligation which a much larger sum would not have overpaid. Besides, he saw two new passengers walking toward

his boat, who doubtless wished to be ferried across the river. They were Phil Courtney and Marion Clarke.

"We are just in time, Mr. Grit," said the young lady, smiling.

"Yes, my good fellow," said Phil condescendingly, "we will employ you again."

"You are very kind," answered Grit, with a smile of amusement.

"I like to encourage you," continued Phil, who was not very quick to interpret the looks of others.

Grit looked at Marion, and noticed that she, too, looked amused.

"Have you had any passengers since we came over?" asked Phil, in a patronizing tone.

He was quite ready to employ his old school-mate, provided he would show proper gratitude, and be suitably impressed by his condescension.

"I have been across several times," answered Grit briefly.

"And how much have you made now?" asked Phil, with what he intended to pass for benevolent interest.

If Phil had been his friend, Grit would not have minded telling him; but he had the pride of self-respect, and he objected to being patronized or condescended to.

"I haven't counted up," he answered.

"I might have brought my own boat," said Phil, "but I like to encourage you."

"Really, Phil, you are appearing in a new character," said Marion. "I never should have taken you for a philanthropist before. I thought you told your mother it would be too much bother to row over in your own boat."

"That was one reason," said Phil, looking slightly embarrassed. "Besides, I didn't want to interfere with Grit's business. He is poor, and has to support his mother out of his earnings."

This was in bad taste, and Grit chafed against it.

"That is true," he said, "but I don't ask any sympathy. I am prosperous enough."

"Oh, yes; you are doing well enough for one in your position, I don't doubt. How much would you give, now, to have as much money as I carry in this pocketbook?" asked Phil boastfully.

He had just passed his birthday, and had received a present of ten dollars from his father, and five dollars each from his mother and an aunt. He had spent a part of it for a hat and in other ways, but still he had seventeen dollars left."

"Perhaps I have as much money," answered Grit quietly.

"Oho! That's a good joke," said Phil.

"No joke at all," said Grit. "I don't know how

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much money you have in your pocketbook, but I presume I can show more."

Phil's face grew red with anger. He was one of those disagreeable boys who are purse-proud, and he was provoked at hearing such a ridiculous assertion from a poor boy who had to earn his own living.

Even Marion regarded Grit with some wonder, for she happened to know how much money her cousin carried, and it seemed to her very improbable that the young boatman should have as much in his possession.

"Don't make a fool of yourself, Grit!" said Phil sharply.

"Thank you; I don't propose to."

"But you are doing it."

"How?"

"Didn't you say you had more money than I?"

"I think I have."

"Hear him talk!" said Phil, with a glance of derision.

By this time the young boatman's grit was up, if I may use the expression, and he resolved to surprise and mortify his young adversary.

"If you are not afraid to test it," he said, "I will leave it to the young lady to decide. Let her count the money in your pocketbook, and I will then give her my wallet for the same purpose."

"Done!" said Phil promptly.

Marion, wondering a little at Grit's confidence, took her cousin's pocketbook, and counted the contents.

"Well, Marion, how much is there?" said Phil exultingly.

"Seventeen dollars and thirty-seven cents," was the announcement of the fair umpire.

Phil smiled triumphantly.

"You didn't think I had so much—eh, Grit?" he said.

"No, I didn't," Grit admitted.

"Now hand over your wallet."

"With pleasure, if Miss Marion will take the trouble," answered the young boatman, with a polite bow.

When Marion opened the wallet, and saw the roll of bills, both she and Phil looked astonished. She proceeded to count the bills, however, and in a tone of serious surprise announced:

"I find sixty dollars here."

"That is right," said Grit quietly, as he received back his wallet, and thrust it into his pocket.

Phil hardly knew whether he was more surprised or mortified at this unexpected result. But a thought struck him.

"Whose money is that?" he demanded abruptly.

"It is mine."

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"I don't believe it. You are carrying it over to some one in Chester."

"Perhaps I am; but, if so, that some one is my mother."

"You don't mean to say that you have sixty dollars of your own?"

"Yes, I do. You didn't think I had so much money—eh, Phil?" he retorted, with a smile.

"I don't believe a word of it," returned Phil crossly. "It is ridiculous that a boy like you should have so much money. It can't be yours."

"Do you doubt it, Miss Marion?" asked Grit, turning to the young lady.

"No; I believe that it is yours since you say so."

"Thank you."

"If it is yours, where did you get it?" asked Phil, whose curiosity overcame his mortification sufficiently to induce him to ask the question.

"I don't feel called upon to tell you," answered Grit.

"Then I can guess."

"Very well. If you guess right, I will admit it."

"You found it, and won't be long before finding the owner."

"You are wrong. The money is mine, and was paid me in the course of business."

Phil did not know what to say, but Marion said pleasantly:

"Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. Grit, on being so well off. You are richer than either of your passengers. I never had sixty dollars of my own in my life."

By this time they had reached the other side of the river, and the two passengers disembarked.

"Well, Phil, you came off second best," said his cousin.

"I can't understand how the boy came into possession of such a sum of money," said Phil, frowning.

"Nor I; but I am sure of one thing."

"What is that?"

"That he came by it honestly."

"Don't be too sure of that," said Phil, shaking his head.

"Phil, you are too bad," said Marion warmly. "You seem to have taken an unaccountable prejudice against Grit. I am sure he seems to me a very nice boy."

"You're welcome to the young boatman's society," said Phil, with a sneer. "You seem to be fond of low company."

"If you call him low company, then perhaps I am. I never met Grit before this morning, but he seems a very polite, spirited boy, and it is certainly to his credit that he supports his mother."

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"I can tell you something about him that may chill your ardor. His father is in jail."

"I heard that it was his stepfather."

"Oh, well, it doesn't matter which."

"In one sense, no. The boy isn't to blame for it."

"No, but it shows of what stock he comes."

Meanwhile, Grit, having fastened his boat, made his way to the cottage on the bluff. He wanted to tell his mother of his good fortune.

CHAPTER VIII

GRIT PUTS HIS MONEY AWAY

"You seem to be in good spirits, Grit," said his mother, as our hero opened the outside door and entered the room where she sat sewing.

"Yes, mother, I have reason to be. Is—is Mr. Brandon home?"

"Yes; he is up-stairs lying down," answered Mrs. Brandon, with a sigh.

Grit rose and closed the door.

"I don't want him to hear what I'm going to tell you," he said. "Mother, I have been very lucky to-day."

"I suppose Mr. Jackson was liberal."

"I should say he was. Guess how much money I have in this wallet, mother."

"Five dollars."

"Multiply that by twelve."

"You don't mean to say that he gave you sixty dollars?" inquired his mother quickly.

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"Yes, I do. See here," and Grit displayed the roll of bills.

"You are, indeed, in luck, Grit. How much good this money will do us. But I forgot," she added, her expression changing to one of anxious solicitude.

"What did you forget, mother?"

"That your father—that Mr. Brandon had returned."

"What difference will that make, mother? I suppose, of course, it will increase our expenses."

"If that were all, Grit."

"What is it, then, you fear, mother?"

"That he will take this money away from you."

"I should like to see him try it," exclaimed Grit, compressing his lips.

"He will try it, Grit. He said only an hour ago that you would have to account to him for your daily earnings."

"Doesn't he mean to do any work himself?"

"I fear not. You know what sort of a man he is, Grit. He probably means to live on what we can earn, and spend his time and what money he can get hold of at the tavern."

"And he calls himself a man!" said Grit disdainfully.

"I am afraid our quiet, happy life is at an end, Grit," sighed his mother.

Grit did not answer for a moment, but he looked stern and determined. Finally, he answered:

"I don't want to make any disturbance, mother, or to act improperly, but I feel sure that we ought not to submit to such treatment."

"What can we do, Grit?"

"If Mr. Brandon cares to stay here we will provide him a home, give him his board, but, as to supplying him with money, we ought not to do it."

"I agree with you, Grit, but I don't see how we can help it. Mr. Brandon is a man, and you are only a boy. I don't want you to quarrel with him."

"I won't if I can help it. By the way, mother, I don't think it will be prudent to leave all this money in the house."

"What can we do with it?"

"I will put it out of my hands. Perhaps I had better not tell you what I am going to do with it, for Mr. Brandon might ask you, and it is better you should be able to tell him that you don't know."

"You are right, Grit."

"I will attend to that matter at once, mother. I will be back in half or three-quarters of an hour," and the young boatman hurried from the house.

He bent his steps to the house of his particular friend, Fred Lawrence, the son of a lawyer in the village. Mr. Lawrence was rated as wealthy by the people of the village, and lived in a house quite

as good as Mr. Courtney's, but his son Fred was a very different style of boy. He had no purse-pride, and it never occurred to him that Grit was unfit to associate with, simply because he was poor, and had to earn a living for himself and his mother by ferrying passengers across the Kennebec. In fact, he regarded Grit as his most intimate friend, and spent as much time in his company as their differing engagements would allow.

Phil Courtney, though he condescended to Grit, regarded Fred as his social equal, and wished to be intimate with him; but Fred did not fancy Phil, and the latter saw, with no little annoyance, that the young boatman's company was preferred to his. It displayed shocking bad taste on the part of Fred, but he did not venture to express himself to the lawyer's son as he would not scruple to do to the young ferryman.

Naturally, when Grit felt the need of advice, he thought of his most intimate friend, and sought the lawyer's house.

He met Fred on the way.

"Hello, Grit!" said Fred, cordially. "Where are you going?"

"I was going to your house."

"Then turn round, and we will go there."

"I can talk with you in the street. I want your advice and help."

"My advice is probably very valuable," said Fred, smiling, "considering my age and experience. However, my help you can rely upon, if I can give it."

"Did you hear that Mr. Brandon had got home?" asked Grit abruptly.

"Your stepfather?"

"Yes; I am sorry to say that there is that tie between us. I presume you know where he has spent the last five years?"

"Yes," answered Fred.

"Of course, I am glad for his sake that he is free; but I am afraid he is going to give us trouble."

"How does he appear?"

"I have not seen him yet."

"How's that?"

"He only arrived to-day, and I was absent when he reached home."

"Does he mean to live here?"

"I am afraid so; and, what is more, I am afraid he means that mother and I shall pay his expenses. He has already told mother that he shall require me to account to him for my daily earnings."

"That will be hard on you."

"Yes; I need all I can make to pay our daily expenses, and I don't feel like letting mother suffer

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for the necessities of life in order to supply Mr. Brandon with money for drink."

"You are right there, Grit. I sympathize with you; but how can I help it?"

"That is what I am coming to. I want to deposit my money with you—that is, what I don't need to use."

"I suppose you haven't much. It might not be well to trust me too far," said Fred, smiling.

"I have sixty dollars here, which I would like to put in your hands—that is, all but two dollars."

"Sixty dollars! Where on earth did you get so much money, Grit?" asked his friend, opening his eyes wide in astonishment.

Grit told the story briefly, and received the warm congratulations of his friend.

"You deserve it all, Grit," he said, "for your brave deed."

"Don't flatter me, Fred, or I may put on airs like Phil Courtney. But, to come back to business—will you do me this favor?"

"Of course, I will. Father has a safe in his office, and I will put the money in there. Whenever you want any of it, you have only to ask me."

"Thank you. That will suit me. I sha'n't break in upon it unless I am obliged to, as I would like to have it in reserve to fall back upon."

"Come and take supper with us, Grit, won't you?" asked Fred cordially.

"Thank you, Fred; not to-night. I haven't seen Mr. Brandon yet, and I may as well get over the first interview as soon as possible. We shall have to come to an understanding, and it is better not to delay it."

"Good night, then; I shall see you to-morrow, for I am going to Portville, and I shall go over in your boat."

"Then we can have a chat together. Good night."

Meanwhile, Mr. Brandon, having slept off his debauch, had come down-stairs.

"Where's the cub?" he asked.

"I wish you wouldn't call him by that name," said his wife. "He wouldn't like it."

"I shall call him what I please. Hasn't he been in?"

"Yes, Grit has been in."

"Grit?"

"That's a nickname the boys have given him, and as everybody calls him so, I have got into that way."

"Oh, well, call him what you like. Has he been in?"

"Yes."

"Where is he now?"

"He went out for a short time. I expect him in every minute."

"Did he leave his day's earnings with you?"

"No," answered Mrs. Brandon, with a troubled look. "He has the best right to that himself."

Has he, hey? We'll see about that. I, as his stepfather and legal guardian, shall have something to say to that."

Mrs. Brandon was not called upon to reply, for the door opened just then, and the young boatman stood in the presence of his worthy stepfather.

CHAPTER IX

A LITTLE DISCUSSION

GRIT was only ten years old when his stepfather began to serve out his sentence at the penitentiary, and the two had not seen each other since. Instead of the small boy he remembered, Brandon saw before him a boy large and strong for his age, of well-knit frame and sturdy look. Five years had made him quite a different boy. His daily exercise in rowing had strengthened his muscles and developed his chest, so that he seemed almost a young man.

Brandon stared in surprise at the boy.

"Is that—the cub?" he asked.

"I object to that name, Mr. Brandon," said Grit quietly.

"You've grown!" said Brandon, still regarding him with curiosity.

"Yes, I ought to have grown some in five years."

It occurred to Mr. Brandon that it might not be

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so easy as he had expected to bully his stepson. He resolved at first to be conciliatory.

"I'm glad to see you," he said. "It's long since we met."

"Yes," answered Grit.

He was not prepared to return the compliment, and express pleasure at his stepfather's return.

"I'm glad you and your mother have got along so well while I was away."

Grit felt tempted to say that they had got along better during Mr. Brandon's absence than when he was with them, but he forebore. He did not want to precipitate a conflict, though, from what his mother had said, he foresaw that one would come soon enough.

"Your mother tells me that you make money by your boat," continued Mr. Brandon.

"Yes, sir."

"That's a good plan. I approve it. How much money have you made to-day, now?"

"I have a dollar or two in my pocket," answered Grit evasively.

"Very good!" said Brandon, in a tone of satisfaction. "You may as well hand it to me."

So the crisis had come! Mrs. Brandon looked at her son and her husband with anxiety, fearing there would be a quarrel, and perhaps something

worse. She was tempted to say something in deprecation, but Grit said promptly:

"Thank you, Mr. Brandon, but I would prefer to keep the money myself."

Brandon was rather taken aback by the boy's perfect coolness and self-possession.

"How old are you?" he asked, with a frown.

"Fifteen."

"Indeed!" sneered Brandon. "I thought, from the way you talked, you were twenty-one. You don't seem to be aware that I am your legal guardian."

"No, sir, I was not aware of it."

"Then it's time you knew it. Ain't I your stepfather?"

"I suppose so," said Grit, with reluctance.

"Ha, you admit that, do you? I'm the master of this house, and it's my place to give orders. Your wages belong to me, but if you are obedient and respectful, I will allow you a small sum daily, say five cents."

"That arrangement is not satisfactory, Mr. Brandon," said Grit firmly.

"Why isn't it?" demanded his stepfather, frowning.

"I use my money to support the family."

"Did I say anything against it? As the master of the house, the bills come to me to be paid, and

therefore I require you to give me every night whatever you may have taken during the day."

"Do you intend to earn anything yourself?" asked Grit pointedly; "or do you expect to live on us?"

"Boy, you are impertinent," said Brandon, coloring.

"Don't provoke Mr. Brandon," said Grit's mother timidly.

"We may as well come to an understanding," said Grit boldly. "I am willing to do all I can for you, mother, but Mr. Brandon is able to take care of himself, and I cannot support him, too."

"Is this the way you talk to your father, you impertinent boy?" exclaimed Brandon wrathfully.

"You are not my father, Mr. Brandon," said Grit coldly.

"It is all the same; I am your mother's husband."

"That's a different thing."

"Once more, are you going to give me the money you have in your pocket?"

"No, sir."

Brandon looked at Grit, and he felt that it would have given him pleasure to shake the rebellion out of his obstinate stepson, but supper was almost ready, and he felt hungry. He decided that it

would be as well to postpone an open outbreak. Grit was in the house, and not likely to run away.

"We'll speak of this another time," he said, waving his hand. "You will find, young man, that it is of no use opposing me. Mrs. Brandon, is supper almost ready?"

"Nearly," answered his wife, glad to have the subject postponed.

"Then serve it as soon as possible," he said, in a lordly tone. "I am to meet a gentleman on business directly afterward."

Supper was on the table in fifteen minutes.

Mr. Brandon ate with evident enjoyment. Indeed, it was so short a time since he had been restricted to prison fare that he relished the plain but well-cooked dishes which his wife prepared.

"Another cup of tea, Mrs. Brandon," he said. "It seems pleasant to be home again after my long absence."

"I shouldn't think he would like to refer to his imprisonment," thought Grit.

"I hope soon to be in business," continued Brandon, "and we shall then be able to live in better style. When that time comes I shall be willing to have Grit retain his small earnings, stipulating only that he shall buy his own clothes, and pay his mother, say, a dollar and a quarter a week for board."

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He said this with the air of a man who considered himself liberal, but neither Grit nor his mother expressed their sense of his generosity.

"Of course, just at present," Mr. Brandon proceeded, "I have no money. The minions of the law took from me all I had when they unjustly thrust me into a foul dungeon. For a time, therefore, I shall be compelled to accept Grit's earnings, but it will not be for long."

Grit said nothing to this hint, but, all the same, he determined, whether for a short or a long time, to resist the exactions of his stepfather.

As for Brandon, his change of front was induced by the thought that he could accomplish by strategem what he might have had some difficulty in securing by force. He still had twenty-five cents of the dollar which his wife had given him in the morning.

When supper was over he rose, and, putting on his hat, said:

"I am going to the village on business. I shall be home in good season. Are you going my way, Grit?"

"Not just at present," answered Grit.

Mother and son looked at each other when they were alone.

"I suppose he's going to the tavern," said Grit.

"Yes, I presume so," said his mother, sighing.

"Well, mother, I didn't give up the money."

"No, Grit; but he means to have it yet."

"He's welcome to it if he can get it," said the boy manfully.

"You haven't got the sixty dollars with you?" said his mother anxiously.

"No; they are safe. I have kept only two dollars, thinking you might need some groceries."

"Yes, I do, Grit. They go off faster, now that we have another mouth to feed."

"Suppose you make out a list of what you want, mother, and I will go up to the store this evening. I may as well save Mr. Brandon from temptation."

His mother made a list, and Grit, putting it in his pocket, walked up to the village.

The groceries, with a pound of steak, cost a dollar and ninety cents.

As Grit took the bundles and walked homeward he thought to himself:

"Mr. Brandon wouldn't feel very well repaid for his trouble if he should take all I have left. He ought to be satisfied with free board, without expecting us to supply him with pocket-money besides. I wonder what he would say if he knew how much money I have deposited with Fred Lawrence?"

Grit congratulated himself that his stepfather

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was not likely to make this discovery, but in this he reckoned without his host.

Mr. Brandon made the discovery that same evening. How it came about will appear in the next chapter.

CHAPTER X

BRANDON LEARNS GRIT'S SECRET

"I HAD no idea the boy had grown so much," said Brandon to himself, as he directed his course toward the tavern. "I thought he was a little kid, but he's almost as big as I am. He's kind of obstinate, too, but he'll find out who's master before long. It's ridiculous, his expectin' to have the handlin' of all the money that comes into the house. Just as if he had any judgment—a boy of his age."

The chances are that Grit's judgment in the matter would have proved better than Brandon's, since the latter proposed to spend a large portion of the money for drink.

"I expect the boy makes a good thing out of his boating," resumed Mr. Brandon. "owned up that he had almost two dollars, and it's likely he earned it all to-day."

Presently Brandon reached the tavern, and entered the barroom.

He called for whisky, and swallowed it with gusto.

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"You may charge it to me," said he carelessly. "I'll pay once a week."

"We don't care to do business that way," said the barkeeper.

"You ain't afraid I won't pay you?" said Brandon, in a tone of affected indignation.

"I don't know whether you would or not, but our terms are cash."

"Oh, well, if you're so strict as that, take it out of this quarter," said Brandon, throwing his sole remaining coin on the counter.

Fifteen cents were returned to him, and in half an hour that sum was also expended at the bar.

It might have been supposed that Brandon would be satisfied, but he was not. He made an attempt to obtain another drink on credit, but the barkeeper proved obdurate.

Then he engaged in a game of cards, and about half-past nine set out to go home, in a better condition than if he had had more money to spend.

"This will never do!" he muttered, in a discontented tone; "I can't be kept so short as this. It is humiliating to think of me, a grown man, going round without a cent in my pocket, while my stepson is reveling in money. I won't have it, and I'll let him understand it."

A few feet in front of Brandon two boys were walking. One of them was Phil Courtney, and the

other Dick Graham, a poor boy, who, by proper subserviency, had earned a position as chief favorite with his companion.

Brandon could not help hearing their conversation. He heard Grit's name mentioned, and this made him listen attentively.

"I can't understand where Grit got his money," Phil was saying.

"How much did you say he had?" inquired Dick.

"Sixty dollars!"

"Whew!"

Brandon felt like saying "Whew!" too, for his amazement was great; but he wanted to hear more, and remained silent.

"Are you sure there were sixty dollars?"

"Yes; my cousin Marion counted it."

"How did Grit happen to show his money?"

"He was boasting that he had more money than I, and I challenged him to show his money."

"I suppose he did show more?"

"Yes; I had only seventeen dollars. But what I can't understand is, where did a common boatman pick up so much money?"

"Perhaps he has been saving for a long time."

"Perhaps so; but I don't believe he could save so much," answered Phil.

"Perhaps he stole it."

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Phil didn't believe this, but he would like to have believed it true.

"I shouldn't wonder if he did, though I don't know where he could get the chance."

"I wonder if he'd lend me five dollars?" thought Dick Graham, though he did not care to let Phil know his thought. He resolved to be more attentive to Grit, in the hope of pecuniary favors. Meanwhile, he did not forget that Phil also was well provided.

"You were pretty well fixed, too," he said. "I wonder how I'd feel if I had seventeen dollars?"

"What do I care about seventeen dollars," said Phil, discontentedly, "when a boy like Grit Morris can show more than three times as much?"

"Oh, well, he'll have to spend it. He won't keep it long. By the way, Phil, will you do me a favor?"

"What is it?" asked Phil, cautiously.

"Won't you lend me two dollars? I want it the worst way. I haven't got a cent to my name."

"I can't spare it," said Phil, curtly.

"It will leave you fifteen——"

"I'm going to use it all. Besides, it would be the same as giving it——"

"No, I'd pay you back in a week or two."

"You've been owing me fifty cents for three

months. If you'd paid that up punctually, perhaps I would have lent you. You'd better go to Grit."

"He isn't my friend, and I thought you might not like my going to him."

"Oh, you can borrow as much as you like of him—the more, the better!" returned Phil, with a laugh.

"I'll try it, then. I shall have to pretend to be his friend."

"All right. The faster he gets rid of his money the better it will suit me."

Brandon heard no more of the conversation, for the boys turned down a side street. But he had heard enough to surprise him.

"Grit got sixty dollars!" he repeated to himself. "Why, the artful young villain! Who'd have thought it? And he coolly refuses to let his father have a cent. He's actually rolling in riches, while I haven't a penny in my purse. And his mother aids and abets him in it, I'll be bound. It's the blackest ingratitude I ever heard of!"

What Grit had to be grateful to him for, Mr. Brandon might have found it difficult to instance, but he actually managed to work himself into a fit of indignation because Grit declined to commit his money to his custody.

Brandon felt very much like a man who has suddenly been informed that a pot of gold was con-

cealed in his back yard. Actually, a member of his family possessed of the handsome sum of sixty dollars. How was he to get it into his own hands?

That was easier to ask than to answer. As he had said, Grit was a stout, strong boy, nearly his equal in size and strength, and he had already had sufficient acquaintance with his firmness—or obstinacy, as he preferred to call it—to make sure that the boy would not give up the money without a struggle. If now he could get hold of the money by stratagem, it would be easier, and make less disturbance.

Where did Grit keep the money?

“He may have given it to his mother,” thought Brandon. “If so, I can find it in one of her bureau drawers. She always used to keep money there. But it is more likely that the boy keeps it in his own pocket. I know what I’ll do. I’ll get up in the night, when he and his mother are asleep, and search his pockets. Gad, how astonished he’ll look in the morning when he searches for it and finds it missing!”

“Sixty dollars’ll set me on my feet again,” he reflected. “Let me see. I’ll go to Boston, and look around, and see if I can pick up a job of some kind. There isn’t anything to do here in this beastly hole. By the way, I wonder where the boy did get so

much money? He must find boatin' more profitable than I had any idea of."

At this point Brandon entered the little path that led to his wife's cottage.

"Mrs. B. is sittin' up," he said, as he saw through the window the figure of his wife in a rocking-chair, apparently occupied with some kind of work. "I'll get her off to bed soon, so that I can have a clear field."

Mrs. Brandon looked up when her husband entered, and noticed, with a feeling of relief, that he was sober. That, however, was not owing to any intentional moderation on his part, but to his lack of funds.

"Sittin' up for me, Mrs. B.?" asked Brandon.

"I generally sit up till past this hour," she answered.

"I feel rather tired myself," said Brandon, succeeding in yawning.

"It isn't on account of having done any work," thought his wife.

"I've been walkin' round considerably, and got tired."

"Do you come from the tavern?" asked Mrs. Brandon, coldly.

"Yes, Mrs. B.; I expected to meet a gentleman there on business, but he disappointed me. Where's Grit?"

"He has gone to bed. He has got to get up early in the morning to help me, and then he spends the day in ferrying passengers across the river."

"That's a bright idea of Grit's. I approve it. He makes considerable money, doesn't he?"

"Considerable for a boy. I don't know what I should do if it were not for Grit."

"Just so. But now I'm home, and shall soon get into business. Then you won't need to depend on him. Of course, I shall need a little money to start with."

Mrs. Brandon did not reply to this obvious hint. She prepared for bed. An hour later, Brandon, having ascertained that his wife was asleep, left the room cautiously and stole into Grit's chamber.

CHAPTER XI

THE MIDNIGHT VISIT

GRIT was not aware that Brandon had discovered his secret, but still was not unprepared for a night visit. As we already know, he had but ten cents left of the two dollars he had reserved, and this coin he put into a small leather purse which he usually carried.

"If Mr. Brandon searches for money he will be disappointed," he said to himself, with a quiet smile. "He won't find enough to pay him for his trouble."

Grit was not anxious enough about his money to keep awake. When, therefore, his stepfather entered his chamber he was fast asleep. Brandon listened for a moment to the deep breathing of the boy, and felt that there was no need of caution. He therefore boldly advanced, candle in hand, to the bedside. The candle he set on the bureau, and then took up Grit's clothes, which hung over a chair, and proceeded to examine the pockets.

His countenance changed as he continued the search.

At last he came to the purse, but it felt empty, and he did not open it with much confidence. Thrusting in his finger, he drew out the solitary dime which it contained.

"Only ten cents!" he exclaimed, with intense disappointment. "It isn't worth taking. On second thoughts, I'll take it, though, for it will pay for a drink."

He pocketed the coin and resumed his search.

"The boy must have a pocketbook somewhere," he muttered. "He wouldn't carry bank-bills in a purse. Where can he keep it?" Once more he explored the pockets of his stepson, but he met with no greater success than before.

It is a curious circumstance that sometimes in profound sleep a person seems vaguely aware of the presence of an intruder, and the feeling is frequently strong enough to disturb slumber. Grit was a sound sleeper, but, however we may account for it, whether it was the instinctive feeling I have mentioned, or the glare of the candle, he woke up, and his glance rested on the kneeling figure of his stepfather rummaging his pockets. Instantly Grit realized the situation, and he felt more amused than indignant, knowing how poorly the searcher would be rewarded.

Brandon's back was turned to him, and our hero felt inclined to try the effect of a practical joke.

In a deep, sepulchral voice, he called out:

"What are you doing there?"

Brandon, taken by surprise, started as if he had been shot, and sprang to his feet in confusion. Turning to the bed, he saw Grit surveying him calmly. Then his natural hardihood restored his self-possession.

"Where do you keep your money, you young cub?" he demanded.

"Where do I keep it? I suspect you know well enough. Haven't you looked into my purse?"

"Yes, and I only found ten cents."

"Did you take it?" asked Grit.

"Yes."

"Then it's lucky I had no more in it."

"Where is the rest of your money?" demanded Brandon.

"What do you mean by the rest of my money?"

"I mean the sixty dollars you had with you to-day."

Grit whistled.

"So you heard I had sixty dollars?" he said.

"Yes."

"It is in a safe place."

"Ha! You own that you had so much money. You wanted to keep it from me, did you?" demanded Brandon, with a frown.

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"Yes, I did," admitted Grit. "Did Phil Courtney tell you I had it?"

"No matter how I heard. I know that you are trying to conceal a large sum of money, which ought to be in my hands."

"Indeed! How do you make that out?"

"I am your stepfather and natural guardian. I am the best person to take care of your money."

"I don't think so, and I propose to keep it myself," said Grit, firmly.

"Do you defy me?" demanded Brandon, angrily.

"If you call my refusing to give you my own money by that name, then I do."

"Boy, you don't know me!" said Brandon, in a tone intended to strike terror into the heart of his stepson. "Hitherto you have had only your mother to look after you, and she has been foolishly indulgent. Now you have a man to deal with. Once more, will you hand me that money?"

"I decline," said Grit, firmly.

"Then on your head be the consequences," said Brandon. "You will hear from me again, and soon."

So saying, he stalked majestically from the chamber.

"I wonder what he means to do?" thought Grit. But the thought did not keep him awake.

CHAPTER XII

GRIT'S MISFORTUNE

THE next morning Grit came down to breakfast nearly an hour later than usual. It might have been because he was unusually fatigued, or it may have been on account of his slumbers having been interrupted. When he came downstairs he looked at the clock, and realized that he had overslept himself.

"I am nearly an hour late, mother," he said. "Why didn't you call me?"

"I thought you were tired, Grit, and needed sleep."

"Where is Mr. Brandon? I suppose he has not got up?"

"Yes; he has had his breakfast and gone out."

"He is in a great hurry to spend my ten cents," said Grit, laughing.

"What do you mean, Grit?"

"I had a visit from him last night," Grit explained. "He rummaged my pockets, and was successful in finding a dime."

"Is it possible?"

"Why should you be surprised, mother? I was not."

"Did he say anything to you?"

"Yes; he has found out somehow about the sixty dollars, and he asked me to give it to him."

"Oh, Grit, I am afraid there will be trouble," said Mrs. Brandon, anxiously. "He won't rest till he gets the money."

"Then he won't rest at all," said Grit, firmly.

"I am afraid you will have to give it to him, Grit."

"Not if I know what I am about. No, mother, the money is safe, where he won't find it. I won't tell you, for he might annoy you till you told him."

"No, Grit; don't tell me. I would rather not know. How happy we were before he came, and how rich we should feel if this money had come to you before Mr. Brandon came home!"

"That is true, mother. It's a shame that he should come home to give us so much trouble!"

"I can't see how it's all going to end," murmured Mrs. Brandon, sadly.

"Nor I; but I mean to resist Mr. Brandon till he finds it's of no use trying to appropriate my money. When he finds he can't get anything out of us except a bare living he may become disgusted and leave us."

"He won't do it while he has any hope left. What do you think he has been trying to persuade me to do, Grit?"

"I don't know."

"He wants me to mortgage this cottage and give him the money."

"Just like him, mother. I hope you were firm?"

"Yes, Grit. I told him I would not consent. It is all we have. I cannot part with our home and the roof that shelters us."

"Of course not, mother. You would be very foolish if you did. Did he mention any one that wanted to buy it?"

"Yes; he said that Mr. Green would be willing to advance money upon it."

"Mr. Green—the landlord of the hotel? I don't doubt it. He knows that Brandon would pay back the whole for drink in a short time."

"I am afraid that would be the case."

"Mother," said Grit, with energy, "promise me that you will never consent to this wicked plan."

"No, Grit, I won't. I consider that the house is as much yours as mine, and I am not willing to leave you without a home."

"I don't so much mind that, for I could shift for myself, somehow; but I want you to keep it in your own hands, and I am not willing that Mr. Brandon should sacrifice it for drink."

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"I agree with you, Grit. Whatever it may cost me, I won't consent."

"The sooner he becomes convinced that he has nothing to hope from either of us, the sooner he will leave us," said Grit. "If I thought he would go away and never come back, I would be willing to let him have the sixty dollars; but it would only make him stay, in the hope of getting more."

By this time Grit had finished his breakfast.

"I must get to work, mother," he said. "I'll be home to dinner at the usual time, if I can."

"If not, I will save something for you, Grit."

The young boatman made his way to the river. Here an unpleasant surprise awaited him. His boat was not where he had left it. He looked in all directions, but it had disappeared.

"What can have become of it?" thought Grit, in perplexity.

CHAPTER XIII

GRIT'S BOAT IS SOLD

BRANDON was not usually an early riser, and would not on this occasion have got up so soon if a bright idea had not occurred to him, likely to bring money to his purse.

It was certainly vexatious that Grit so obstinately refused to pay into his hands the money he had managed in some way unknown to his stepfather to accumulate. Perhaps some way of forcing the boy to do so might suggest itself; but meanwhile he was penniless—that is, with the exception of the dime he had abstracted during the night. Possibly his wife might have some money. He proceeded to sound her on the subject.

"Mrs. B.," he said, "I shall have to trouble you for a little money."

"I gave you a dollar yesterday," said Mrs. Brandon.

"What's a dollar? I have none of it left now."

"Did you spend it at the tavern?" asked his wife, gravely.

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"I am not willing to be catechized upon that point," returned Brandon, in a tone of lofty dignity.

"It is quite impossible to supply you with money for such a purpose," continued Mrs. Brandon. "What money Grit earns is wanted for necessary expenses."

"I am not so easily deceived," said her husband, nodding sagaciously.

"It is quite true."

"I won't argue the point, Mrs. B. Have you any change now? That is the question."

"No, I have not."

"Be it so. I have only to remark that you and your son will have occasion to regret the unfriendly and suspicious manner in which you see fit to treat me."

So saying, Mr. Brandon sat down to his breakfast, which he ate with an appetite such as is usually earned by honest toil.

When he rose from the table he left the cottage without a word.

"How is all this to end?" thought Mrs. Brandon, following his retreating form with an anxious glance. "He has not been here twenty-four hours yet, and he has spent a dollar of Grit's hard earnings, and is dissatisfied because we will not give him

more. Besides, he has already broached the subject of mortgaging the house, and all to gratify his insatiable thirst for strong drink."

Certainly the prospects were not very bright, and Mrs. Brandon might well be excused for feeling anxious.

Though Brandon had ten cents in his pocket, the price of a glass of whisky, he did not go at once to the tavern, as might have been expected. Instead of this, he bent his steps toward the river.

He knew about where Grit kept his boat, and went directly to it.

"Ha! a very good boat," he said, after surveying it critically. "It ought to be worth ten dollars, at least, though I suppose I can't get over five for it. Well, five dollars will be a lift to me, and if Grit wants another boat he's got the money to buy one. I can get even with him this way, at least. He'd better have treated me well and saved his boat."

The boat was tied fast, but this presented no insurmountable difficulty.

Brandon pulled a jack-knife out of his pocket, and after a while—for it was very dull—succeeded in severing the rope.

Then he jumped into the boat and began to row out into the stream.

He was a little at a loss at first as to where he

would be most likely to find a purchaser. In his five years' absence from the neighborhood he had lost his former acquaintances, and there had been, besides, changes in the population.

As he was rowing at random, he chanced to look back at the shore he had left, and noticed that a boy was signaling to him.

He recognized him as the boy whom he had heard speaking of Grit's treasure, and, being desirous of hearing more on the subject, he at once began to pull back to the river bank.

The boy, as the reader will surmise, was Phil Courtney.

"Hello, there!" said Phil; "isn't that Grit Morris' boat?"

"No; it's mine."

"It is the same Grit usually rows in," said Phil, beginning to suspect Brandon of theft.

"That may be, but the boat is mine."

"Did he sell it to you?"

"No."

"Who are you, then?"

"I am Mr. Brandon, Grit's stepfather."

Phil whistled.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said, surveying Brandon, not over respectfully, for he knew where he had spent the last five years. "So you've come home?"

"Yes; but I might as well have stayed away."

"How is that?" asked Phil, regarding the man before him with curiosity.

Brandon was not too proud to speak of his domestic grievances, as he regarded them, to a stranger.

"My wife and son treat me like a stranger," he said. "Instead of giving me a warm welcome after my long absence, they seem to be sorry to see me."

"I don't wonder much," thought Phil, but he did not say so, not being averse to drawing Brandon out on this subject.

"And that reminds me, young gentleman. I was walking behind you last evening, and I heard you say something about Grit's having a large sum of money."

"Yes; he showed me sixty dollars yesterday."

"Are you sure there was as much as that?" inquired Brandon, eagerly.

"Yes, I am sure, for my cousin counted it in my presence."

"It might have belonged to some one else," suggested Brandon.

"No; I thought so myself, but Grit said it belonged to him."

"Did he say where he got it?"

"No; he's mighty close about his affairs. I couldn't help wondering myself, and asked him, but he wouldn't tell me."

"If he's got as much money as that, he ought to give it to me to take care of."

"Why don't you make him give it to you?" suggested Phil, maliciously.

"I did ask him, but he refused. A boy of his age ought not to carry about so much money. Did he carry it in a roll of bills, or in a pocketbook?"

"He had it in a wallet."

"I didn't see the wallet," thought Brandon. "I only found the purse. The boy must have hidden it somewhere. I must look for it."

"What are you going to do about it?" asked Phil. "Are you going to let him keep it?"

"Not if I can find it. I will take it away from him if I get the chance."

"I wish he would," thought Phil. "It would soon go for drink, and then Master Grit wouldn't put on so many airs."

"May I ask your name?" asked Brandon.

"I am Phil Courtney, the son of Squire Courtney, the president of the bank," answered Phil, pompously.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Brandon, in a tone of flattering deference. "I am proud to know you. You come of a fine family."

"Yes, my father stands pretty high," remarked Phil, complacently.

"Really," thought he, "this man has very good

manners, even if he has just come from the penitentiary. He treats me with a good deal more respect than Grit does. If I could help him to get the money I would."

"Not a man in town stands higher," said Brandon, emphatically. "Are you a friend of my stepson?"

"Well, hardly," answered Phil, shrugging his shoulders. "You must excuse my saying so, but Grit hasn't very good manners, and, though I patronize him by riding in his boat, I cannot regard him as a fitting associate."

"You are entirely right, young gentleman," said Brandon. "Though Grit is my stepson, I am not blind to his faults. He has behaved very badly to me already, and I shall be obliged to require him to treat me with more respect. If he would only copy you I should be very glad."

"You are very polite, Mr. Brandon," said Phil, flattered. "I hope, for your sake, that Grit will improve."

"By the way, Mr. Courtney"—Phil swelled with conscious pride at this designation—"do you know any one who would like to buy a boat?"

"What boat do you refer to?" asked Phil.

"This boat."

"But I thought it was Grit's."

"I am his stepfather, and have decided to sell it."

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"What'll you take?" asked Phil, not unwilling to buy a good boat, especially as he knew it would annoy Grit.

"It is worth ten dollars, but I will sell it for six dollars cash."

"Say five, and I'll take it."

"Very well, Mr. Courtney, seeing it's you, I will say five."

"It's a bargain."

Phil had his money in his pocket, and he lost no time in binding the bargain by paying the money.

"I think I'll take a row myself," he said.

He jumped into the boat, and Brandon, with five dollars in his pocket, took the nearest road to the tavern.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BILL OF SALE

A SUDDEN thought struck Phil, and he called back Brandon.

"What's wanted now?" asked the latter impatiently.

"I want you to give me a bill of sale of the boat," said Phil.

"What's the use of that?"

"I don't want Grit to charge me with taking his boat without leave."

"Oh, bother! it's all right. I haven't got any paper," said Brandon, who was anxious to reach the tavern and take his morning dram.

"I have," said Phil, promptly, as he drew out a small note-book and tore out a leaf, which he handed, with a pencil, to Brandon.

"What do you want me to write?" asked the latter.

Phil dictated a form, which Brandon wrote down and signed.

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"Will that do?" he asked.

"Yes, that will do. Now I am all right, and the boat is mine, in spite of all Grit may say."

"I have made a good bargain," said Phil to himself, complacently. "This boat is worth at least twice what I have paid for it. I will get it painted, and a new name for it, and it will pass for a new boat. Won't Grit be mad when he hears what his stepfather has done?"

This was, on the whole, the pleasantest reflection connected with the purchase. It was not creditable to Phil to cherish such malice against a boy simply because he would not treat him with as much deference as he expected; but human nature is often betrayed into petty meannesses, and Phil was a very human boy, so far, at least, as such traits were concerned.

We now come back to Grit, who stood on the river's bank in perplexity when he discovered that his boat had been abstracted.

"Who can have taken it?" he thought.

Here he felt quite at a loss. It did not occur to him that his stepfather had had anything to do with his boat, for he could not understand of what advantage it would be to him. He did not comprehend fully, however, how serious the loss was likely to prove, since it took away his means of living.

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He stooped over and examined the rope. Clearly, it had been cut, and this showed that the boat had been taken by some unauthorized person.

"I cannot understand who would serve me such a trick," thought Grit. "I don't know that I have any enemies."

But at this point he could not help thinking of Phil Courtney, who, if not an enemy, was certainly not a friend.

"Is it possible that Phil would play me such a trick?" he asked himself. "No; he would think too much of himself. He would not condescend to do such a thing."

Grit walked up and down along the river bank, looking here and there to see if anywhere he could descry his boat. At length he saw a boat, but the boat was not his. It belonged to Jesse Burns, the son of the postmaster, and was of about the same size and build as his own.

"Jesse!" he called out, putting his hands to his mouth to increase the volume of sound.

Jesse heard the call, and rowed toward where Grit was standing.

"What is it, Grit?"

"My boat has been taken, and I don't know what has become of it."

"Is that so?" asked Jesse, in surprise. "Why, I saw Phil Courtney out on the river with it. I

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passed him only fifteen minutes since. I thought you had let it to him."

"Phil Courtney!" exclaimed Grit, angry and surprised. "I didn't think he would take it without leave."

"Did he?"

"Yes; I found the rope cut."

"That doesn't seem like Phil. He's mean enough to do anything, but I didn't think he would do that."

"Nor I. I'll give him a good piece of my mind when we meet. Where did you meet him?"

"Just above Glen Cove."

"Do me a favor, Jesse. Take me into your boat and row me up there, so that I may meet him and recover my boat."

"All right, Grit. I'm very glad to do you a favor."

"Are you sure it is my boat Phil had?" asked Grit, still unwilling to believe that Phil had deliberately taken his boat.

"Yes; I know your boat as well as my own. Besides, there was the name, *Water Lily*, on it, as plain as day. There is no doubt about it."

"Well," said Grit, closing his lips firmly, "all I can say is, I'll make him pay for the use of the boat, or there'll be trouble."

"You won't challenge him, will you, Grit?" asked Jesse, smiling.

"That's just what I will do. I should be justified in thrashing him, without notice, but I will give him a chance to defend himself."

"If you want a second, call on me," said Jesse. "I don't like Phil any better than you do, and I shan't object to seeing his pride humbled. It's bad for your business, having the boat taken."

"Yes; I shall lose the chance of two passengers who wanted to go across to Portville an hour from now."

"You may use my boat for that, Grit."

"Thank you, Jesse; I should like to, if I don't get back my own. Did you speak to Phil?"

"No. I said 'good morning,' but, with his usual politeness, he only gave a slight nod, and did not answer. I wanted to ask him how it happened that he was using your boat so early in the morning, but, you see, I got no chance."

"It is queer. I can't guess what he will have to say for himself."

"There he is now!" said Jesse, suddenly, looking up the river.

"Where?"

"Don't you see? He is rowing this way. His back is turned, and he hasn't seen us yet."

Yes, it was Phil. He had enjoyed a good row,

and now was on his return course. He was rowing slowly and lazily, as if fatigued.

"You will soon hear what he has to say, Grit," said Jesse.

At that moment Phil chanced to turn round, and he saw and recognized the boys that were approaching him. He did not, however, seem confused or embarrassed, neither did he change his course. He merely smiled, and continued to row toward his pursuers.

"He sees us, and still he comes on. There's cheek for you!" ejaculated Jesse.

Grit said nothing, but his mouth closed firmly, and his eyes sparkled with anger. He waited till Phil was within earshot, and then he demanded sternly:

"What are you doing there with my boat, Phil Courtney?"

Phil would have resented Grit's tone, but he gloated over the triumphant answer he was able to make, and thought he would tantalize Grit a little.

"To what boat do you allude?" he asked, in a nonchalant tone.

"To what boat do I allude?" repeated Grit, provoked. "I allude to my boat, in which you are rowing."

"You are mistaken," said Phil, composedly. "I am rowing in my own boat."

"Isn't that the *Water Lily*?" asked Jesse, coming to the help of his friend.

"It is at present. I shall change the name for one I like better."

"Look here, Phil Courtney!" said Grit, indignantly, "this is carrying the joke a little too far. You have taken my boat without leave or license from me, and now you actually claim it as your own. Do you mean to say that isn't the boat I have been rowing on this river for the last year?"

"I never said it wasn't."

"Isn't it the boat in which I carried you across the river yesterday?"

"Of course."

"Then what business had you to cut the rope and carry it off?"

"I didn't."

"Then how did you come by it?"

"I bought it!"

"Bought it!" exclaimed Grit and Jesse simultaneously.

"Yes, I bought it, and it is mine," continued Phil, with a smile of triumph. "It's just as much mine to-day as it was yours yesterday."

"I never sold it to you," said Grit, perplexed.

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"No, but your stepfather, Mr. Brandon, did. If the rope was cut, he cut it."

"Can you prove this, Phil Courtney?" asked Grit.

"If you will row up alongside, I will satisfy your curiosity."

Jesse pulled his boat alongside, and Phil drew from his vest pocket a paper and handed it to Grit.

"Read that," he said.

Grit read as follows:

"In consideration of five dollars, to me paid, I make over and sell the boat called the *Water Lily* to Philip Courtney.

"NATHAN BRANDON."

"There!" said Philip, triumphantly. "What have you to say now?"

CHAPTER XV

GRIT ENGAGES ANOTHER BOAT

WHEN Phil displayed the bill of sale, made out in due form by Brandon, Grit was for the moment taken aback.

"Whose boat is it now?" continued Phil, triumphantly.

"It is mine," answered Grit, quietly, "for Mr. Brandon had no right to sell it."

"I have nothing to do with that," said Phil. "He is your stepfather—you ought to feel proud of having a jailbird in the family—and he told me the boat was his."

"I shall not contest your claim at present," said Grit. "As long as it passes out of my hands, you may as well have it as any one."

"I'll sell it back for ten dollars," said Phil, who had a keen scent for a bargain.

"Thank you! I don't care to buy back my own property. Besides, Mr. Brandon would be ready to sell it again to-morrow. As to what you say of

him, I shan't undertake to defend him. I am not particularly proud of the relationship."

"What are you going to do for a boat to ferry your passengers?" asked Phil.

"I don't know."

"I'll let you this for fifty cents a day."

"That would be about half of my receipts, and you would get your money back in ten days. I don't care about making such a bargain as that."

"You'll have to give up your business, then," said Phil.

"No, he won't," said Jesse Burns. "I will give him the use of mine, and won't charge him a cent."

"Thank you, Jesse. You are a true friend!" said Grit, warmly. "You are doing me a great favor."

"And I am glad to do it. Suppose we pull to land? There are three persons at the landing who look as if they wanted to be ferried across."

Grit seized the oars and impelled the boat to land. As Jesse had said, there were three persons waiting, a gentleman and two ladies, who at once engaged the services of the young boatman.

For this service he received thirty cents, and, finding two persons at the other end who wished to come to Chester, the first hour in his new boat brought him fifty cents.

Grit's spirits rose. His misfortune was not ir-

remediable, after all. He had feared that his means of living were taken away, and, though he had money enough to buy a new boat, he did not dare to do so, lest Brandon should also sell that.

"I'll give him a piece of my mind," he thought. "It's contemptible to come home and live on us, and then to take away my means of living."

"Meanwhile, Brandon had gone to the tavern, which he entered with a swagger, and immediately called for a glass of whisky.

The barkeeper hesitated.

"My orders are not to sell on credit," he said.

"Who wants you to sell on credit?" asked Brandon, haughtily.

"You had no money last night."

"I've got some now. What do you say to that?" and he displayed the five-dollar bill he had received from Phil Courtney.

"That alters the case," said the barkeeper, complaisantly. "Your money is as good as anybody's."

"I should say so. Give me another."

When Brandon left the barroom, he had spent a dollar, having drunk himself and treated others.

"Wonder if Grit has found out about his boat?" he said to himself, with a waggish smile, as he walked homeward with unsteady steps. "Serves the boy right for treating me so disrespectfully."

It was not much out of his way to go down to

the margin of the river, and he did so. It happened that, as he reached it, Grit had just arrived from Portville with a second load of passengers. Fortune, as if to compensate him for his loss of a boat, had brought him an unusual number of passengers, so that he had already earned a dollar.

When Brandon saw Grit engaged in his usual avocation he opened wide his eyes in surprise.

"Has the boy got his boat back again?" he asked himself.

He was not familiar with the appearance of the boat, and the name had slipped from his recollection. Then, also, Jesse's boat looked very much like Grit's.

When the passengers had walked away Brandon took measures to gratify his curiosity.

"Where did you get that boat, Grit?" he asked.

"Ah, it's you, is it?" said Grit, seeing his stepfather for the first time. "What business had you to sell my boat, Mr. Brandon?"

"Ain't I your stepfather, I'd like to know?" retorted Brandon.

"I am sorry to say you are," answered Grit; "but that doesn't give you any authority to steal and sell my boat."

"Don't you dare to charge me with stealin', you—you young puppy!" exclaimed Brandon, indig-

nantly. "If you had behaved as you ought to me, I wouldn't have meddled with your boat."

"I understand you, Mr. Brandon. Because I wouldn't give you the money that I need to support my mother you meanly and maliciously plot to take away my means of living."

"You wouldn't give me your money to take care of for you."

"You take care of my money for me!" returned Grit, disdainfully. "I know very well how you would take care of it. You've already spent a part of the five dollars you received for stolen property at the tavern, and the result is that you can't walk straight."

"You lie! I can walk as straight as you!" said Brandon, and proceeded to prove it by falling against a tree and recovering his equilibrium with difficulty.

"I see you can," said Grit, sarcastically.

"Of course I can. Where did you get that boat? Is it the same——"

"The same you stole from me? No, it isn't."

"Have you bought it?" inquired Brandon, with a cunning look.

"No, I haven't, and I don't intend to buy another boat for you to sell. I have borrowed it of my friend, Jesse Burns."

Mr. Brandon looked disappointed. He had

thought the new boat would prove a second bonanza, and he was already considering whether he could find another purchaser for it.

"Have you made much money this mornin', Grit?" next inquired Brandon, changing the conversation.

"I decline to tell you," answered Grit, shortly.

"Grit, you don't seem to reflect that I am your stepfather, and set in authority over you."

"I am not very likely to forget that I have a stepfather I am ashamed of," said Grit.

"This is unkind, Grit," said Brandon, in a voice tremulous with maudlin sentiment. "Because I've been unfortunate, and have been shut out from all enjoyment for five years, you mock and insult me when I get home and pine for domestic happiness."

"If you would behave decently you wouldn't be reminded of the past," said Grit. "But how is it? You haven't been home but twenty-four hours, and have already borrowed all the money mother had and have sold my boat to gratify your taste for rum. There may be more contemptible men in the world, but I never met with one."

"Grit, if you talk to me in that way," said Brandon, with attempted dignity, "I shall be under the necessity of flogging you."

"You'd better not try it, Mr. Brandon. I

wouldn't stand still while you were doing it—I promise you that."

Just then two gentlemen came down to Phil's pier, and one asked:

"Can you take us across to Portville?"

"Yes, sir," answered Grit, promptly.

The two gentlemen got in, and Grit was about to push off, when Brandon said:

"Stop, Grit; I'll go, too."

"You'll have to wait, Mr. Brandon," said Grit, coolly, and a determined push sent the boat out into the stream and frustrated the design of his step-father.

"You don't want any more passengers, I see," said one of the gentlemen, smiling.

"Not of that kind," answered Grit.

"You are right. The man had evidently been drinking, and his presence would have been disagreeable to us."

When the boat reached the opposite shore the gentleman who had engaged him handed Grit half a dollar.

Grit was about to offer change, but the passenger said:

"No, keep the change, my lad. You'll find a use for it, I make no doubt."

"After all," thought Grit, who did not forget

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to thank his liberal patron, "this isn't going to be so bad a day for me."

Five minutes later a man with a heavy black beard and rather shabbily attired presented himself as a passenger.

"I say, boy," said he, "do you know a man named Brandon that has recently gone to Chester?"

"Yes," answered Grit.

"All right. When we get over on the other side you can just point out to me where he lives."

CHAPTER XVI

MR. BRANDON'S FRIEND

IT was clear that Grit's new passenger was a stranger in the neighborhood. Had he been a resident of Chester or Portville the young boatman would have known him. It must be confessed, however, that the appearance of the newcomer was not such as to render any one anxious to make his acquaintance. He was a black-haired, low-browed man, with a cunning, crafty look, and, to sum up, with the general appearance of a tramp.

He seated himself comfortably and scanned the young boatman critically.

"Where do you live?" he asked abruptly.

"In Chester," answered Grit, briefly.

"That's where my friend Brandon lives, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Do you know him?"

"Yes."

Grit felt reluctant to admit that any tie existed between himself and the returned convict.

"Brandon's wife is living, isn't she?"

"Yes."

"There's a kid, isn't there?"

"Mrs. Brandon has a son, if that's what you mean," said Grit.

"Of course, that's what I mean. Mrs. Brandon got any property?"

Grit was getting provoked. He did not fancy discussing his mother's affairs with a man of this stamp.

"You seem to feel considerable interest in the family," he could not help saying.

"S'pose I do! That's my business, isn't it?"

"I suppose so," answered Grit.

"Well, why don't you answer my question?" demanded the passenger, impatiently.

"I haven't agreed to answer your questions; I have engaged to row you across the river, and I am doing it."

"Look here, boy!" said the passenger, bending his brows, "I don't want you to talk back to me—do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear; but if you ask me any questions I shall answer as I please."

"You will, hey? I've a great mind to throw you into the river."

"That wouldn't do you any good. You wouldn't

get over any quicker, and, besides, you would find yourself under arrest before night."

"And you would drown."

"Not if I could help it. I can swim across the river easily."

"You are a cool hand. Then you are not willing to answer my questions?"

"I will, if you will answer mine."

"Go ahead. I'll see about it."

"Where did you meet Mr. Brandon?"

"Where? Well, let that pass."

It so happened that the two had first met as fellow-prisoners—a confession the passenger did not care to make. Grit inferred this from the reluctance displayed in giving the answer.

"What is your name?"

"Thomas Travers," answered the passenger, rather slowly. "What is yours?"

"Harry Morris."

This answer revealed nothing, since Travers did not know the name of Brandon's wife before marriage.

"Do you make much ferrying passengers across the river?"

"I do pretty well."

"What is your fare?"

"Ten cents."

"Pretty good. I'd do it for that myself."

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"There's a chance to run opposition to me," said Grit, smiling.

"I've got more important business on hand. So you know Brandon, do you?"

"Yes, I know him."

"Do you know his wife?"

"Yes."

"Has she property?"

"She owns the small cottage she lives in."

"Good!" said Travers, nodding. "That's lucky for Brandon."

"How is it?" asked Grit, desirous of drawing out Travers, as he probably knew Mr. Brandon's intentions, and it was important that these should be understood.

"It's a good thing to have property in the family. My friend Brandon is short of funds, and he can sell the house or raise money on it."

"Without his wife's consent?"

"Oh, she'll have to give in," said Travers, nonchalantly.

"We'll see about that," said Grit to himself, but he did not utter his thoughts aloud.

By this time they had reached the opposite shore of the river, and Travers stepped out of the boat.

He felt in his vest pocket, as a matter of form, but did not succeed in finding anything there.

"I've got no change, boy," he said. "I'll get some from Brandon and pay you to-morrow."

"Mr. Brandon's credit isn't good with me," said Grit.

"Ha! does he owe you money?"

"I refused to take him across the river this morning," answered Grit.

"Look here, young fellow, that isn't the way to carry on business. When you insult my friend Brandon you insult me. I've a great mind never to ride across on your boat again."

"I don't mind losing your patronage," repeated Grit. "It doesn't pay."

"We'll discuss that another time. Where does my friend Brandon live?"

"You can inquire," returned Grit, by no means anxious to point out the way to his mother's house to this objectionable stranger.

"You're the most impudent boy I've met lately," said Travers, angrily. "I'll settle you yet."

"Better settle with me first, Mr. Travers," said Grit, coolly, and he pushed his boat back into the stream.

"I wonder who he is?" thought Travers, as he walked away from the boat landing. "I must ask Brandon. I wish I could meet him. I'm precious short of funds, and I depend on him to take care of me for a few days."

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Thomas Travers passed by the little cottage on the bluff, quite unaware that it was the house he was in search of. He kept on his way toward the village, not meeting any one of whom he could ask the proper direction.

At length, greatly to his relief, he espied in the distance the familiar figure of Brandon, walking—or, more properly, reeling—toward him.

“That’s he—that’s my friend Brandon!” he exclaimed joyfully. “Now I’m all right. Say, old fellow, how are you?”

“Is it you, Travers?” said Brandon, trying to steady himself.

“Yes, it’s I—Tom Travers?”

“When did you get out?”

“Sh! Don’t speak too loud!” said Travers, looking about him cautiously. “I got out two days after you.”

“What are you doing here?”

“Just come. Come to see you, old boy. I can stay with you, can’t I?”

Brandon looked dubious.

“I don’t know what Mrs. B. will say,” he answered slowly.

“You’re boss in your own house, ain’t you?”

“Well, that’s where it is! It isn’t my own house. It belongs to Mrs. B.”

“Same thing, I take it.”

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"No, it isn't. The old lady's bound to keep it in her own hands."

"Can't you sell or mortgage it?"

"She won't let me."

"Bah! Can't you control a woman?" returned Travers, disdainfully.

"I might, but for the cub."

"The boy?"

"Yes. He's the most obstinate, perverse, independent young kid you ever saw."

"You don't say so!"

"Fact! It's pretty hard on me."

"Then he'll make a pretty good match for the boy I met this morning."

"Where?"

"The boy that ferried me across the river. He's as sassy a young kid as I ever saw."

"Why, that's him—that's Grit."

"Grit! He told me his name was Harry Morris."

"So it is, and his mother was Mrs. Morris before I married her."

"You don't mean to say that boy is your stepson?"

"Yes, he is."

"Whew!" whistled Travers. "Well, he doesn't seem to admire you very much," continued the visitor.

"No, doesn't treat me with any respect. If it wasn't for him I could manage his mother. He sets her against me, and gets her to stand out against anything I propose. It's hard, Travers," continued Brandon, showing an inclination to indulge in maudlin tears.

"Then why do you submit to it, Brandon? Ain't you a match for a boy like that? Why, you ain't half the man I thought you was."

"Ain't I? I was too much for Grit this morning, anyway," said Brandon, with a cunning smile.

"What did you do?"

"I sold his boat before he was up, and he had to borrow another."

"Good!" exclaimed Travers, delighted. "You're a trump! Have you got any of the money left?"

"A little."

"Then steer for the tavern, old fellow. I'm awfully thirsty."

The next hour was spent in the barroom, and then the worthy and well-matched pair bent their steps toward the little cottage, Travers supporting his friend Brandon as well as he could.

CHAPTER XVII

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR

MRS. BRANDON was laying the cloth for dinner when she heard a scuffling sound, as of footsteps, in the entry.

"Who is with Mr. Brandon?" she thought. "It can't be Grit. They wouldn't be likely to come home together."

Her uncertainty was soon at an end, for the door was opened and her husband reeled in, sinking into the nearest chair, of necessity, for his limbs refused to support him. Just behind him was Mr. Thomas Travers, who was also under the influence of his recent potations, but not to the same extent as his companion.

"How do, Mrs. B.?" said her liege lord. "Mrs. B., I have the pleasure of introducin' my frien' Travers. Come in, Travers."

Mrs. Brandon surveyed the two with a look of disgust, and did not speak.

"I hope I see you well, ma'am," said Travers,

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rather awkwardly, endeavoring, with some difficulty, to maintain an erect attitude. "Sorry to intrude, but my old friend Brandon insisted."

"You can come in if you like," said Mrs. Brandon, coldly.

"I say, Mrs. B., is dinner almost ready. My frien', Mr. Travers, is hungry, an' so'm I."

"Dinner is nearly ready. I suppose, Mr. Brandon, you have just come from the tavern?"

"Yes, Mrs. B., I've come from the tavern," hic-coughed Brandon. "Have you anything to say against it?"

"I would say something if it would do any good," said his wife, despondently.

"If you think—hic—that I've been drinkin', Mrs. B., you're mistaken; ain't she, Travers?"

"You didn't drink enough to hurt you, Brandon?" said his companion, coming to his assistance.

Mrs. Brandon looked at Travers, but did not deign to answer him. It was clear that his assurance possessed no value in her eyes.

She continued her preparations and laid the dinner on the table.

Then she went to the door and, shading her eyes, looked out, hoping to see Grit on his way home. But she looked in vain. Just as he was about fastening his boat, or, rather, the boat he had bor-

rowed, two passengers came up and wished to be conveyed across the river.

"My dinner can wait," thought Grit. "I must not disappoint passengers."

So his coming home was delayed, and Brandon and his friend had the field to themselves.

When dinner was ready, Brandon staggered to the table and seated himself.

"Sit down, Travers," he said. "You're in my house, and you must make yourself at home."

He said this a little defiantly, for he saw by Mrs. Brandon's expression that she was not pleased with his friend's presence.

"I'm glad to hear it," said Travers, with a knowing smile. "I was told that the house belonged to your wife."

"It's the same thing, isn't it, Mrs. B.?" returned Brandon.

"Not quite," answered his wife, bitterly. "If it were, we should not have a roof over our heads."

"There you go again!" said Brandon, fiercely, pounding the table with the handle of his knife. "Don't let me hear no more such talk. I'm master here, d'ye hear that?"

"That's the talk, Brandon!" said Travers, approvingly. "I like to hear a man show proper independence. Of course you're master here."

Mrs. Brandon was of a gentle nature, but she

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was roused to resentment by this rudeness. Turning to Travers, she said:

"I don't know who you are, sir, but your remarks are offensive and displeasing."

"I'm the friend of my friend Brandon," said Travers insolently, "and as long as he don't complain of my remarks, I shall remark what I please. What d'ye say, Brandon?"

"Quite right, Travers, old boy! You're in my house, and I expect you to be treated accordingly. Mrs. B., you will be kind enough to remember that this gen'leman is a frien' of mine," and Brandon closed the sentence with a drunken hiccough.

"I think it necessary to say that this house belongs to me," said Mrs. Brandon, "and that no one is welcome who does not treat me with respect."

"Spunky, eh?" said Travers, laughing rudely.

"Yes, she's spunky," said Brandon, "but we'll cure her of that, eh, Travers?—the same way as I cured that boy of hers."

"That was good!" laughed Travers. "He's an impudent young rascal."

Mrs. Brandon was alarmed. What did they mean by their references? What had been done to Grit, and how had he been served? Was it possible that Brandon had dared to use violence to the boy? The very thought hardened her, and gave her courage.

"Mr. Brandon," she said, with flashing eyes, "what do you mean? What have you done to Grit? Have you dared to illtreat him? If you have, it will be a bad day's work for you."

"Ha! She threatens you, Brandon. Now, brace up, man, and show your spunk," said Traversers, enjoying the scene.

"I'm not account'ble to you, Mrs. B.," stammered Brandon, in what he essayed to make a dignified tone. "Grit is my stepson, and I'm his natural guardian."

"Mr. Brandon, what have you done to Grit?" persisted his wife, with flashing eyes. "Have you dared to lay a finger upon him?"

"I'll lay two fingers, three fingers, on him, if I like," said Brandon doggedly. "He's a sassy puppy, Mrs. B."

Mrs. Brandon became more and more anxious. Generally, Grit was home by this time, and his failure to appear led the anxious mother to conclude that he had been injured by her husband.

"Where is Grit?" she asked, with startling emphasis.

"He's all right," stammered Brandon.

"He's all right, but he isn't happy," said Traversers, laughing. "That was a good move of yours, selling his boat."

"Did you sell Grit's boat, Mr. Brandon?" demanded his wife quickly.

"Yes, I did, Mrs. B. Have you got anything to say against it?"

"I say that it was a mean, contemptible, dishonest act!" said Mrs. Brandon warmly. "You have taken away the poor boy's means of living, in order to gratify your love of drink. The food which you are eating was bought with his earnings. How do you expect to live, now that you have taken away his boat?"

"He'll get along; he's got sixty dollars," said Brandon thickly.

"Sixty dollars won't last forever. To whom did you sell the boat?"

"Phil Courtney."

"He was just the boy to buy it. Little he cared for the harm he was doing poor Grit. How much did he pay for it?"

"Five dollars."

"And how much of the money have you got left?"

Brandon drew out two silver half-dollars from his pocket.

"That's all I've got left," he said.

"And you have actually squandered four dollars on liquor, you and your friend!" said Mrs.

Brandon—"nearly the whole sum you received for my poor boy's boat!"

"Hush up, Mrs. B.! It's none of your business," said Brandon.

"That's the way to talk, Brandon!" said Travers, surveying the scene with boorish delight. "I like to see a man show the proper spirit of a man. I like to see a man master in his own house."

"You would not insult me so if Grit were here!" said Mrs. Brandon, with a red spot on either cheek.

"Mr. Brandon, I tolerate your presence here, because I was foolish enough to accept you as my husband. As for this man whom you have brought here, he is unwelcome. He has dared to insult me while sitting at my table, and I ask him in your presence to leave the house."

"Travers is my frien'; he will stay here, Mrs. B., and don't forget it!"

Brandon pounded the table as he spoke, and nodded his head vigorously.

"Sorry to disappoint you, Mrs. Brandon," said Travers impudently, "but when my friend Brandon tells me to stay, stay I must. If you don't enjoy my being here, let me suggest to you, in the politest manner, to go and take a walk. Eh, Brandon?"

"Yes, go take a walk!" said Brandon, echoing his friend's remark. "I'll have you to know, Mrs.

B., that this is my house, an' I am master here. My frien' Travers will stay here as long as he pleases."

"That's the talk, Brandon. I knew you weren't under petticoat government. You're too much of a man for that."

"Yesh, I'm too much of a man for that," said Brandon, sleepily.

Travers took from his pocket a clay pipe, and, deliberately filling the bowl with tobacco, began to smoke.

As he leaned back in his chair, winking insolently at Mrs. Brandon, the poor woman cried:

"Will no one relieve me from this insolent intruder?"

The words caught the ears of Grit, who entered at this moment.

He looked from one to the other of the two men who sat at his mother's table, and his eyes flashed, and his boyish form dilated with passion.

CHAPTER XVIII

A STORMY TIME

"WHAT does this mean?" demanded Grit, in a stern voice. "What have these men been doing?"

"Oh, Grit, I am glad you are here!" said his mother. "Mr. Brandon has brought this man here against my will, and he has treated me rudely."

Travers looked round and saw the boy.

"Hello, my young friend!" he said. "You didn't tell me that my friend Brandon was your step-father."

"Because I was ashamed of it," answered Grit promptly.

"D'ye hear that, Brandon?" said Travers. "The boy says he is ashamed of you."

"I'll settle with him when I feel better," said Brandon, who realized that he was not in a condition even to deal with a boy. "He's a bad-mannered cub, an' deserves a floggin'."

"You won't give it to me!" said Grit contemptuously. "What is the name of this man you have brought into the house?"

"He's my frien' Travers," answered Brandon.
"My frien' Travers is a gen'l'man."

"A gentleman isn't insolent to ladies," retorted Grit. "Mr. Travers, if that is your name, my mother wishes you to leave the house."

"Couldn't do it," said Travers, leering. "My frien' Brandon wants me to stay—don't you, Brandon?"

"Certainly, Travers. This is my house, an' I'm master of the house. Don't you mind what Mrs. B. or this cub says. Just stay where you are, and stand by me."

"I'll do it with pleasure," said Travers. "My friend Brandon is the master of this house, and what he says I will do."

"Mr. Travers," said Grit firmly, "you shall not stay here. This house belongs to my mother, and she wishes you to go. I suppose you can understand that?"

"My dear boy, you may as well shut up. I sha'n't go."

"You won't!" said Grit menacingly.

"Oh, Grit, don't get into any difficulty," said his mother, becoming alarmed.

Travers puffed away at his pipe, surveying Grit with an insulting smile.

"Listen to your mother, boy!" he said. "She talks sense."

"Mother," said Grit quietly, "will you be kind enough to go up-stairs for five minutes? I will deal with these men."

"I will go if you think it best, Grit; but do be cautious. I am sure Mr. Travers will see the impropriety of his remaining here against my wishes."

"I may see it in a few days," said Travers insolently. "Don't trouble yourself, ma'am. The law is on my side, and I am the guest of my friend Brandon. Isn't that so, Brandon?"

"To be sure, Travers," said Brandon, in a drowsy tone.

"Mr. Brandon's friends are not welcome here," said Grit, "nor is he himself welcome."

"That's an unkind thing for your own boy to say," said Brandon, in a tone which he tried to make pathetic. "Because I've been unfortunate, my own family turns against me."

"If you had behaved decently, Mr. Brandon, we would have tolerated your presence," said Grit; "but during the short time you have been here, you have annoyed and robbed mother and myself, and spent the money you stole at the tavern. We have had enough of you!"

"Do you hear that, Travers?" asked Brandon, by a ludicrous transition shedding maudlin tears. "Do you hear that ungrateful boy?"

Meanwhile, Mrs. Brandon, in accordance with Grit's request, had left the room.

Grit felt that the time had come for decisive measures. He was not a quarrelsome boy, nor was he given to fighting, but he had plenty of spirit, and he was deeply moved and provoked by the insolence of Travers.

Some consideration he perhaps owed to his mother's husband; but to his disreputable companion, none whatever.

"Mr. Travers," he said, with cool determination, turning toward the intruder, "did you hear me say that my mother desired you to leave the house?"

"I don't care that for your mother!" said Travers, snapping his fingers. "My friend Brandon——"

He did not complete the sentence. Grit could not restrain himself when he heard this insolent defiance of his mother, and, without a moment's hesitation, he approached Travers, with one sweep of his arm dashed the pipe he was smoking into a hundred pieces, and, seizing the astonished visitor by the shoulders, pushed him forcibly to the door and thrust him out.

Travers was so astonished that he was quite unable to resist, nor indeed was he a match for the strong and muscular boy in his present condition.

"Well, that beats all I ever heard of!" he muttered, as he stumbled into a sitting position on the door-step.

Brandon stared at Grit and his summary proceeding in a dazed manner.

"Wha—what's all this, Grit?" he asked, trying to rise from his chair. "How dare you treat my friend Travers so rudely?"

Grit's blood was up. His cheeks were flushed, and his eyes sparkled with resentment.

"Mr. Brandon," he said, "we have borne with you, my mother and I, but this has got to stop. When you bring one of your disreputable friends here to insult my mother, you've got me to deal with. Don't you dare bring that man here again!"

This was, I admit, rather a singular tone for a boy of Grit's age to assume, but it must be considered what provocation he had. Circumstances had made him feel older than he really was. For nearly five years he had been his mother's adviser, protector, and dependence, and he felt indignant through and through at the mean and dastardly course of his stepfather.

"Don't be sassy, Grit," said Brandon, slipping back into his chair. "I'm the master of this house."

"That is where you are mistaken, Mr. Brandon," said Grit.

"Perhaps you are," retorted Brandon, with mild sarcasm.

"This house has no master. My mother is the mistress and owner," said Grit.

"I'm goin' to flog you, Grit, when I feel better."

"I'm willing to wait," said Grit calmly.

Here there was an interruption. The ejected guest rose from his sitting posture on the steps, and essayed to lift the latch and gain fresh admittance.

He failed, for Grit, foreseeing the attempt, had bolted the door.

Finding he could not open the door, Travers rattled the latch and called out:

"Open the door, Brandon, and let me in!"

"Open the door, Grit," said his stepfather, not finding it convenient to rise.

"I refuse to do so, Mr. Brandon," said Grit, in a firm tone.

"Why don't you let me in?" was heard from the outside, as Travers rattled the latch once more.

"I'll have to open it myself," said Brandon, half rising and trying to steady himself.

The attempt was vain, for he had already drunk more than was good for him when he met Travers, and had drunk several glasses on top of that.

Instead of going to the door, he sank helpless and miserable on the floor.

"That disposes of him," said Grit, eying the

prostrate form with a glance of disgust and contempt. "I shall be able to manage the other one now with less trouble."

"Let me in, Brandon!" repeated Travers, beginning to pound on the door.

Grit went to a window on a line with the door, and, raising it, looked out at the beseiging force.

"Mr. Travers," he said, "you may as well go away; you won't get back into the house."

"My friend Brandon will let me in. You're only a boy. My friend Brandon is the master of the house. He will let me in."

"Your friend Brandon is lying on the floor, drunk, and doesn't hear you," said Grit.

"Then I'll let myself in!" said Travers, with an oath.

He picked up a rock, and began to pound the door, to the imminent danger of breaking the panels. "There's more than one way to get in. When I get in, I'll mash you!"

The time had come for decisive action. Drunk as he was, Travers would sooner or later break down the door, and then there would be trouble.

Grit seized an old pistol which lay on the mantelpiece. It had long been disused, and was so rusty that it was very doubtful whether any use could have been made of it. Still it presented a

formidable appearance, as the young boatman pointed it at Travers.

"Stop pounding that door, or I fire!" Grit exclaimed, in a commanding tone.

Travers turned quickly at the word, and as he saw the rusty weapon pointed at him, his small stock of courage left him, and he turned pale, for he was a coward at heart.

"For the Lord's sake, don't fire!" he cried hastily.

CHAPTER XIX

TRAVERS PICKS UP A FRIEND

TRAVERS looked the picture of fright as he beheld the rusty pistol which Grit pointed at him.

"Don't fire, for the Lord's sake!" he repeated, in alarm.

"Will you go away, then, and give up troubling us?" demanded the young boatman sternly.

"Yes, yes, I'll go," said Travers hurriedly. "Lower the pistol. It might go off."

Grit lowered the weapon, as desired, seeing that Travers was likely to keep his word.

"Tell Brandon I want to see him. I will be at the tavern this afternoon at four o'clock."

"I'll tell him," said Grit, who preferred that his stepfather should be anywhere rather than at home.

Having got rid of Travers, Grit turned to survey his stepfather, who was lying on the floor, breathing heavily. His eyes were closed, and he seemed in a drunken stupor.

"How long have we got to submit to this?"

thought Grit. "I must go up and consult with mother about what is to be done."

He went up-stairs, and found his mother seated in her chamber, nervously awaiting the issue of the interview between Grit and the worthy pair below.

"Are they gone, Grit?" she asked quickly.

"Travers is gone, mother. I turned him out of the house."

"Did you have any trouble with him?"

"I should have had, but he was too weak to resist me, on account of having drunk too much."

"I thought I heard him pounding on the door."

"So he did, but I frightened him away with the old pistol," and Grit laughed at the remembrance. "He thought it was loaded."

"He may come back again," said Mrs. Brandon apprehensively.

"Yes, he may. Brandon is likely to draw such company. I wish we could get rid of him, too."

"What a fatal mistake I made in marrying that man!" said Mrs. Brandon, mournfully.

"That is true, mother, but it can't be helped now. The question is, what shall we do?"

"Where is he?"

"Lying on the floor, drunk," said Grit, in a tone of disgust. "We may as well leave him there for the present."

"He has hardly been home twenty-four hours,

yet how he has changed our quiet life. If he would only reform!"

"Not much chance of that, mother."

"What shall we do, Grit?" asked Mrs. Brandon, who was wont to come to Grit, young as he was, for advice.

"I have thought of two ways. I might buy him a ticket for Boston, if I thought he would use it. It would be of no use to give him the money, or he would spend it at the tavern instead."

"If he would only leave us to ourselves, it would be a blessing."

"If he won't hear of that, there is another way."

"What is it?"

"I could engage board for you and myself at the house of one of our neighbors for a week."

"What good would that do, Grit?"

"You would prepare no meals at home, and Mr. Brandon would be starved out. While he can live upon us, and raise money to buy liquor at the tavern, there is little chance of getting rid of him."

"I don't know, Grit. It seems a harsh thing to do."

"But consider the circumstances, mother. We can't allow him to continue annoying us as he has done."

"Do as you think best, Grit."

"Then I will go over to Mrs. Sprague's and ask

if she will take us for a few days. That will probably be sufficient."

Going down-stairs, Grit saw his stepfather still lying on the floor. Grit's step aroused him, and he lifted his head.

"S'that you, Grit?" he asked, in thick accents.

"Yes, sir."

"Where's my frien' Travers?"

"He's gone."

"Where's he gone?"

"To the tavern. He said he would meet you there at four o'clock."

"What time is it?" asked Brandon, trying to get up.

"Two o'clock."

"I'll be there. You tell him so, Grit."

"I will if I see him."

Grit went on his way to Mrs. Sprague's, and had no difficulty in making the arrangement he desired for his mother and himself, when she learned that Mr. Brandon was not to come, too.

"I feel for your mother, Grit," she said. "If I can help her in this trial, I certainly will."

"Thank you, Mrs. Sprague. I will return and tell her. Perhaps she may come over by the middle of the afternoon. I don't like to leave her alone in the house with Mr. Brandon."

"She will be welcome whenever she comes, Grit."

"You had better go over at once, mother," said Grit, on his return. "A drunken man is not fit company for you."

Mrs. Brandon was easily persuaded to take the step recommended, and her husband was left in the house alone.

Meanwhile, Travers went on his way to the tavern. It was rather a serious thing for him to be turned out of his friend's house, for he had but a scanty supply of money, and his appearance was not likely to give him credit.

"Confound that boy!" he muttered. "He's just reckless enough to shoot me, if I don't give up to him. I pity Brandon, having such a son as that."

It would have been more in order to pity Grit for having such a stepfather, but Travers looked upon the matter from his own point of view, which, it is needless to say, was influenced by his own interests.

"Will they take me at the tavern?" he thought to himself. "If they won't, I shall have to sleep out, and that would be hard for a gentleman like me."

When we are in a tight place, help often comes from unexpected quarters, and this to those who hardly deserve such a favor. So it happened in the case of Travers.

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As he was walking slowly along, his face wrinkled with perplexity, he attracted the attention of a tall man, dressed in black, who might readily have passed for a clergyman, so far as his externals went. He crossed the street, and accosted Travers.

"My friend," he said, "you appear to be in trouble."

"So I am," answered Travers readily.

"Of what nature?"

"I've just been turned out of the house of the only friend I have in the village, and I don't know where to go."

"Go to the tavern."

"So I would if I had money enough to pay my score. You haven't got five dollars to spare, have you?"

Travers had no expectation of being answered in the affirmative, and he was surprised, as well as gratified, when the stranger drew out his wallet, and, taking therefrom a five-dollar bill, put it into his hand.

"There," said he.

"Well!" exclaimed the astonished Travers, "you're a gentleman if ever there was one. May I know the name of such an—an ornament to his species?"

The stranger smiled.

"I am glad you appreciate my little favor," he

said. "As to my name, you may call me Colonel Johnson."

"Proud to know you, colonel," said Travers, clasping the hand of his new acquaintance warmly.

"What is your name?" asked Johnson.

"Thomas Travers."

"I am glad to know you, Mr. Travers," said the colonel. "Let me drop you a hint. There's more money where that came from."

"You couldn't lend me any more, could you?" asked Travers eagerly.

"Well, not exactly lend, Mr. Travers, "but perhaps we can enter into a little business arrangement."

"All right, colonel," said Travers briskly. "I'm out of business. Fact is, I've been in seclusion lately—confined to the house in fact, and haven't been able to earn anything."

"Just so. Suppose we take a walk in yonder field, and I will tell you what I have in view."

They got over the fence, and walked slowly along a path that led a quarter of a mile farther on into the woods.

Here they sat down under a tree, and Colonel Johnson, producing a couple of cigars and a match, said:

"I can always talk better when I am smoking. Have one, Travers?"

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"You're a man after my own heart, colonel," said Travers enthusiastically. "Now, if I only had a nip I should be in clover."

"Take one, then, said the colonel, producing a pocket-flask of brandy.

Travers was by no means bashful in accepting this invitation.

CHAPTER XX

A PROMISING PLAN

THE conference between Colonel Johnson and Travers was apparently of great interest to the latter. It is important that the reader should be made acquainted with its nature.

"I take it for granted, Mr. Travers," said the colonel, after their potation, "that you are ready to undertake a job if there is money in it."

"That's as true as you live," said Travers emphatically.

"Am I also right in concluding that you are not squeamish as to how the money is earned? You are not overburdened with conscientious scruples, eh?"

"Not much! They're all nonsense," returned Travers.

"Good! I see you are the sort of a man I took you for. Now you must, to begin with, promise that you will regard as confidential what I am about to say to you."

"Tom Travers can be relied upon, colonel. He's safe every time."

"Good again! Then I shall not hesitate to unfold to you my little plan. I believe you have a bank in the village?"

"Yes; but, colonel, I am a stranger here. I only know one person—my friend Brandon."

"Is he—the same kind of a man as yourself?" inquired Johnson.

"The same identical kind, colonel. What is it Shakespeare, or some other poet, says:

" 'Two flowers upon a single stalk,
Two hearts that beat as one.' "

"I compliment you on your knowledge of poetry, Mr. Travers. I didn't think it was in you."

Travers looked complimented.

"I've had an education, colonel," he said complacently, "though circumstances have been against me for the last four years. As for my friend Brandon, he's one you can rely upon."

"I shall probably require his services as well as yours," said Johnson. "Now let me proceed. You agree with me that bank capitalists are grasping monopolists, that they grind down the poor man, and live in luxury at the expense of the poor laborer."

"Just my notion, colonel!"

"And whatever we can get out of them is what they richly deserve to lose?"

"Just so!"

"Well and good! I see you agree with me. And now, friend Travers, I will tell you what I have in view, and why it is that I need the services of two gentlemen like you and your friend. The fact is"—here Johnson dropped the mask, being assured of the character of his listener—"there's a good haul to be made within three days—a haul which, if successful, will make all three of us easy in our circumstances for years to come."

"Go ahead, colonel. I'm with you, and my friend Brandon, too. I'll answer for him. We both need a lift mightily."

"I learn—no matter how"—said Johnson, lowering his voice, "that a messenger from the bank goes to Boston day after to-morrow with a package of thirty thousand dollars in government bonds. He's to carry them to the Merchant's National Bank in Boston. These bonds are not registered, but coupon bonds, and can be easily sold. They are at a premium of fifteen or sixteen per cent., which would bring up the value to nearly or quite thirty-five thousand dollars."

Travers listened with eager interest. He began

to understand the service that was expected of him, but it did not apparently shock him.

"Well?" he said.

"My plan," continued Colonel Johnson, "is for you and your friend to follow this bank messenger, and between here and Boston to relieve him of this package. You will meet me at a spot agreed upon in or near the city, and I will take the package."

"You will take the package?" repeated Travers blankly.

"Yes, but I will reward you liberally for your service. You and Brandon will each receive from me, in case the affair succeeds, the sum of five thousand dollars."

"I thought we would share and share alike," said Travers, in a tone of disappointment.

"Nonsense, man! Isn't it my plan? Am I to reap no benefit from my own conception? Besides, shall I not have the care and responsibility of disposing of the bonds? This will involve danger."

"So will our part involve danger," objected Travers.

"That is true, but your hazard is small. There will be two of you to one bank messenger. Besides, I take it for granted that you will be adroit enough to relieve the messenger without his knowing anything about it. When he discovers his loss you will be out of sight. It strikes me you will be rewarded

very handsomely for the small labor imposed upon you."

Travers made a further effort to secure better terms, but his new acquaintance was firm in refusing them. The result was, that Travers unconditionally accepted for himself and Brandon.

"When shall you see your friend Brandon, as you call him?" inquired the colonel.

"This afternoon," answered Travers promptly.

"Good! I like your promptness."

"That is, if I can," continued Travers, a shade doubtfully, for he remembered the summary manner in which he had been ejected from the house of his congenial companion and friend.

"Very well. Then we will postpone further debate till you have done so. I shall stay at the tavern here, and you can readily find me."

"I will stay there, too. I was staying with my friend Brandon, but his wife and her son did not treat me well, and I left them. They want to separate us—old friends as we are."

"They are jealous of you," suggested Johnson, smiling.

"Just so, but I'll euchre them yet."

The two walked together to the road, and there they separated, Johnson suggesting that it might be prudent for them not to be seen together too much.

Travers assented, and turned back in the direc-

tion of the house he had recently left under rather mortifying circumstances.

"The boy'll be gone to his boat," he thought, "and I don't care for the old lady. She doesn't like me, but I can stand that. I must see my friend Brandon, if I can."

Although Travers decided that Grit had returned to his boat, he approached the house cautiously. He thought it possible that Grit might still be on guard with the formidable pistol which he had pointed at him an hour or more earlier, and he did not like the looks of the weapon.

"It might go off!" he thought. "That plaguey boy is awful reckless, and he wouldn't mind shooting a gentleman, if he felt like it. I'd like to pitch him into the water, pistol and all," he ejaculated fervently, in conclusion.

As I have said, Travers approached the little cottage with cautious steps. Drawing near, he listened to see if he could hear any sound of voices that would betray the presence of the boy he wished to avoid.

All was still. Nothing was to be heard but the deep breathing of Brandon, who still lay on the floor in a stupor. Grit was back at his boat, and Mrs. Brandon had already left the house and gone to spend the remainder of the afternoon with her

neighbor. Brandon was, therefore, the only occupant of the cottage.

"I hear my friend Brandon," said Travers to himself. "I can hear nothing of the boy. He must be away."

By way of ascertaining definitely, Travers moved round to the window and peered in. He caught sight of the prostrate figure of Brandon, but could see no one else.

"It's all right," he said to himself, in a satisfied tone.

He tried the door, and found it unlocked.

He entered, and stooping over, seized Brandon by the shoulder, and called him loudly by name.

"I say, Brandon, wake up!"

"Go away, Grit," said Brandon drowsily.

"It isn't Grit. It's I—your friend Travers," said that gentleman.

"Thought my frien' Travers was gone," muttered Brandon, opening his eyes.

"So I did, but I've come back. I want to see you on important business."

"'Portant business?" repeated Brandon.

"Yes, very important business. Do you want to earn five thousand dollars?"

"Five thousand dollars!" said Brandon, roused by this startling inquiry. "'Course I do."

"Then rouse yourself, and I'll tell you all about

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it. Here, let me bring you some water, and you can dip your face in it. It will bring you to yourself sooner than anything else."

Brandon acceded to the proposal, and was soon in a clearer state of mind.

Travers proceeded to unfold his plan, after learning that Mrs. Brandon was out; but he had a listener he did not know of. Grit had come home for something he had forgotten, and, with his ear to the keyhole, heard the whole plot. He listened attentively. When all was told, he said to himself:

"I'll foil them, or my name isn't Grit!"

CHAPTER XXI

MR. BRANDON LOSES HIS SUPPER

WHEN Brandon and Travers had discussed the plan, and decided to accept the terms offered by Colonel Johnson, the latter, looking cautiously about, inquired:

"Where's the boy?"

"Out with the boat, I expect," said Brandon.

"He's a little ruffian. I never saw such a desperate boy of his age."

"He managed you neatly," said Brandon, with a smile.

"Pooh!" returned Travers, who did not like the allusion. "I didn't want to hurt the boy."

"He didn't want to harm you," said Brandon, with an exasperating smile.

"I could wind him round my finger," said Travers disdainfully. "You don't think I'm afraid of that half-grown cub, I hope."

Grit heard this, and smiled to himself at the evident annoyance of Travers.

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"As to winding me round his finger," thought the young boatman, "I may have something to say about that."

Brandon did not continue his raillery, not wishing to provoke the friend who had secured him participation in so profitable a job.

"Where's the old lady?" asked Travers, with a glance toward the staircase.

"I believe she's gone out, but I'll see."

Brandon went to the foot of the stairs, and called:

"Mrs. B.!"

There was no response.

"Yes, she's gone, and the coast is clear. Where are you staying, Travers?"

"I s'pose I'll have to stay at the hotel, unless you can provide for me here."

"You'd better go to the tavern, for there might be trouble about keepin' you here. Mrs. B. and the boy don't like you."

"I thought you were master of the house," said Travers, with mild sarcasm.

"So I am," answered Brandon, a little embarrassed, "but I don't want to be in hot water all the time."

"You don't want me to stay for supper, I reckon?"

"Well, I guess not to-night. Fact is, I don't

know when we shall have supper. Mrs. B. ought to be here gettin' it ready."

"Come out and have a walk, Brandon. I will introduce you to Colonel Johnson, and we can talk this thing over."

"All right. That'll take up the time till supper."

The two men walked over to the tavern, and Colonel Johnson walked out with them. They had a conference together, but it is not necessary to give the details here.

A little after six o'clock Brandon directed his steps homeward.

"I'll be a little late to supper," he said to himself, "but Mrs. B. will save some for me. I feel confoundedly hungry. Must be in the air. There's nothing like country air to give a man a good appetite."

Brandon opened the door of the cottage, and went in. All was quiet and solitary, as he had left it.

"Well. I'll be blowed!" he ejaculated. "What does all this mean? Where's Mrs. B., and where's supper?"

He sat down, and looked about him in surprise and bewilderment.

"What has become of Mrs. B.?" he thought. "She hasn't gone and left me, just when I've come

home after an absence of five years? That boy can't have carried her off, can he?"

Brandon did not have long to debate this question in his own mind, for the door opened, and Grit and his mother entered. Brandon was relieved, but he could not forbear expressing his vexation.

"Well, Mrs. B.," he said, "this I call pretty goings on. Are you aware that it is nearly seven o'clock, ma'am?"

"I supposed it was," answered his wife quietly.

"And you've left me to starve here, ma'am! This is a strange time for supper."

"We've had supper," answered Grit coolly.

"Had supper!" ejaculated Brandon, looking about him. "I don't see any signs of supper."

"You won't see any signs of it here," continued Grit.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that mother and I have engaged board at Mrs. Sprague's. We have just had supper there."

"You have! Well, that's a new start. It doesn't matter much, though. I'll go over and get mine."

"We haven't made any arrangements for you," said Grit. "I shall pay for my mother's board and mine. You can make any bargain you like for your board."

"Well, if that isn't the meanest treatment I ever

received!" exclaimed Brandon, in wrath and disgust. "You actually begrudge me the little I eat, and turn me adrift in the cold world!"

"That's one way of looking at it, Mr. Brandon," said Grit. "Here's the other: You are a strong man, in good health, and able to work. Most men in your position expect to support a family, but you come to live upon my earnings, and expect me not only to provide you with board, but with money for the purpose of drink. That isn't all! You bring home one of your disreputable companions, and expect us to provide for him, too. Now, I am willing to work for mother, and consider it a privilege to do so, but I can't do any more. If you don't choose to contribute to the support of the family, you must at least take care of yourself. I am not going to do it."

"How hard and unfeeling you are, Grit!" said Brandon, in a tone of a martyr. "After all I have suffered in the last five years you treat me like this."

"As to the last five years, Mr. Brandon," said Grit, "I should think you would hardly care to refer to them. It was certainly your own fault that you were not as free as I am."

"I was the victim of circumstances," whined Brandon.

"We won't discuss that," said Grit. "You had a fair trial, and were sentenced to five years' im-

prisonment. About the unkindness. I should like to know what you think of a man who deliberately takes away the means of earning a living from his stepson, who is filling his place, and supporting his family, in order to gratify his miserable love of drink."

"You drove me to it, Grit."

"How did I drive you to it?"

"You would not give me from your overflowing hoards, when I felt sick and in need of a mild stimulus. You had sixty dollars, and would not spare me one."

"So you sold my boat for half price, and squandered nearly the whole proceeds in one forenoon!" exclaimed Grit scornfully. "Mr. Brandon, your reasoning is altogether too thin. We have decided to leave you to support yourself as you can."

Here the glowing prospects offered by the plan suggested by Colonel Johnson occurred to Brandon, and his tone changed.

"You may find you have made a mistake, Grit, you and Mrs. B., said Brandon pompously. "You have snubbed and illtreated me because you looked upon me as a poor, destitute, friendless man. It's the way of the world! But you may regret it, and that very soon. What will you say when I tell you I have a chance to earn five thousand dollars in the next five days, eh?"

Mrs. Brandon looked surprised, for Grit had not thought it wise to confide to his mother what he had heard of the conversation between Travers and his stepfather. Grit, on the other hand, was immediately interested, for the compensation offered was one of the things he had not overheard.

"Five thousand dollars!" he repeated, appearing to be surprised.

"Yes, five thousand dollars!" repeated Brandon complacently. "That's a thousand dollars a day! Perhaps you won't be so anxious to get rid of me when I am worth my thousands."

"That's pretty good pay," said Grit quietly. "What have you got to do?"

"That would be telling," said Brandon cunningly. "It's a joint speculation of my friend Travers and myself—my friend Travers, whom you treated so badly. It's he that's brought me this fine offer, and you insult and order him out of the house. You were just as bad as Grit, Mrs. B."

"You are welcome to all you make, Mr. Brandon," said Grit. "Neither my mother nor myself will ask a penny of the handsome sum you expect to make. You can spend it all on yourself if you like. All we ask is, that you will take care of yourself, and leave us alone."

"I mean to do so," said Brandon independently, "but, as I sha'n't get the money for three or four

days, I should like to borrow five dollars, and I'll repay you double within a week."

"That's a very generous offer," said Grit, "but I don't lend without better security."

"Isn't there anything to eat in the house, Mrs. B.?" asked Brandon, changing the subject. "I'm famished."

"You will find some cold meat, and bread, and butter in the pantry."

Brandon went to the pantry, and satisfied his appetite as well as he could. He then went out, and Grit soon followed.

"Mother," he said, "I have an important call to make, but will be back soon."

It will be remembered that Mr. Courtney had formerly been president of the bank, but proving unpopular in consequence of his disposition to manage it in his own interest, Mr. Philo Graves, a manufacturer, was put in his place. To the house of Mr. Graves Grit directed his steps.

CHAPTER XXII

BANK OFFICIALS IN COUNCIL

MR. GRAVES was at home, but he was not alone. Mr. Courtney had dropped in, and as he was still a director of the bank, it was natural that the conversation should turn upon affairs of the bank in which he and Mr. Graves had a common interest. Though no longer president, Mr. Courtney was still anxious to control the affairs of the bank, and to make it of as much service to himself as possible. He had recently become interested in certain speculative securities, through a firm of Wall Street brokers, and finding himself rather cramped for money, desired to obtain a loan on them from the bank. To this end he had sought a preliminary interview with Mr. Graves, previous to making a formal application to the full board of directors.

"You are aware, Mr. Courtney," said the president, "that to grant your request would be contrary to the general usage of the bank."

"I ought to know the usage of the bank, having

served as president for three years," said Mr. Courtney. "In my time such loans were made."

Mr. Graves was aware of this, but he was also aware that such loans had been made on the former president's sole authority, and either to himself or some one of his friends, and that it was on account of this very circumstance that he had been removed from office.

"I know that such loans were made, but I am equally certain that such a course would not meet the approval of the directors."

"But," insinuated Mr. Courtney, "if you openly favored it, and my vote as director was given, we could probably influence enough other votes to accomplish our object."

"I cannot say whether this would or would not follow," said Mr. Graves, "but I am bound to say for myself that I cannot recommend, or vote for, granting such a loan."

"Perhaps you think I am not responsible," said Mr. Courtney, irritated.

"I presume you are, but that ought not to be considered, when the question is about violating our fixed usage."

"It seems to me, considering my official connection with the bank, that a point might be strained in my favor."

"That is not my view, Mr. Courtney; although

I am now president, I should not care to ask any special favor of the bank. I prefer to be treated like any other customer."

Mr. Courtney mentally voted Graves slow and behind the times. In his views, one great advantage of holding a high financial position was to favor himself and his own interests, without special regard to the welfare of the corporation or stockholders.

"You wouldn't find many bank presidents agree with you, Mr. Graves," said Courtney impatiently.

"I am sorry to hear it," returned the president gravely. "It seems to me that I owe a duty to the stockholders of the bank which ought to override any personal considerations."

"You are very quixotic in your ideas," said Courtney coldly.

"I am sure I am right, at any rate," returned Graves firmly.

"I consider your refusal unfriendly—nay, more, I think it is calculated to throw suspicion on my financial position."

"Not at all. I have no reason to doubt your financial stability, and as to the unkindness, when I distinctly state that I would not ask such a favor for myself, you will see that I am disposed to treat you as well as myself."

"It may be so," sneered Courtney, "but I pre-

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sume you are not at present in need of a personal loan, and—circumstances alter cases, you know.”

“If you mean that I shall at any future time ask favors for myself, which I am not disposed to grant to you, you are mistaken,” said the president.

“My financial position is as strong as yours,” said Courtney, rather irrelevantly.

“Very probably you are a richer man than I am, but as I said, that is not in question.”

At this point a servant entered, and said to the president:

“Mr. Graves, there is a boy outside who says he wants to see you.”

“What boy is it?”

“Grit Morris.”

“Very well; you can bring him in.”

“The young boatman?” said Courtney contemptuously. “I wouldn’t allow a boy like that to take up my time.”

“He may have something of importance to communicate. Besides, I don’t set so high a value on my time.”

This will illustrate the difference between the two men. Mr. Graves was pleasant and affable to all, while Mr. Courtney was stiff, and apparently always possessed of a high idea of his own importance and dignity. In this respect, his son Phil was his counterpart.

Into the presence of these two gentlemen Grit was admitted.

"Good morning, Grit," said the president pleasantly. "Take a seat. Margaret tells me you wish to see me."

"Yes, sir, I wish to see you on a matter of importance."

"Perhaps he wants a loan from the bank," suggested Mr. Courtney scornfully.

"If Grit wanted a loan, he would not need to apply to the bank," said Mr. Graves, in a friendly manner. "I would lend him, myself."

"Thank you, Mr. Graves," said Grit gratefully, "but I don't wish any loan for myself. My business relates to the bank, however."

Both gentlemen were rather surprised to hear this. They could not understand what business Grit could have with the bank.

"Go on, Grit," said Mr. Graves. "Mr. Courtney is one of our directors, so that you may speak freely before him."

"I understand," commenced Grit, coming at once to the point, "that you are intending to send up thirty thousand dollars in government bonds to the Merchants' Bank, in Boston."

Mr. Graves and Mr. Courtney looked at each other in surprise. This was a bank secret, and such matters were generally kept very close with them.

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"How did you learn this?" asked the president, in surprise, "and if so, what can you have to say in regard to it?"

"Perhaps he wants to be the messenger," said Mr. Courtney, with a derisive smile.

Grit took no notice of this, for his mind was occupied with the plan of the would-be robbers.

"I will tell you at once," he said. "There is a plan to waylay the messenger, and relieve him of the bonds."

Here was a fresh surprise. Mr. Graves began to find Grit's communication of absorbing interest.

"How do you know this?" he asked cautiously.

"Because I overheard the robbers discussing their plan."

"You say the robbers. Then there are more than one?"

"Yes, there are two."

"Are you willing to tell me who they are, Grit?"

"That is what I came to tell you. I am sorry to say that one is my stepfather, as I am obliged to call him, Mr. Brandon."

"Mr. Brandon? I thought he was——" Here Mr. Graves paused, out of delicacy.

"He has been in prison until a few days since," said Grit, understanding what the president of the bank intended to say, "but now he is free."

"And where is he?"

"He is living at our house. Since he got back, he has given my mother and myself a great deal of trouble. Not content with living on us, he has spent what money he could get at the tavern, and because I would give him no more, he sold my boat without my knowledge."

"That was bad, Grit. To whom did he sell it?" asked Mr. Graves.

"To Mr. Courtney's son Phil!" answered Grit.

"My son's name is Philip," said Mr. Courtney.

"We boys generally call him Phil," said Grit, smiling. "However, that doesn't matter."

"My son had a right to purchase the boat," said Mr. Courtney.

"I have nothing to say as to that, at any rate now," returned Grit. "I only mention it to show how Mr. Brandon has treated us."

"Who was the other conspirator, Grit?" asked Graves.

"A companion of Mr. Brandon's, named Travers. I understand they are to be employed by a third person, now staying at the hotel, a man named Johnson."

"One thing more, Grit, how did you come to hear of their plan?"

Grit answered this question fully. He related how he had overheard the conference between his step-father and Travers in the afternoon.

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"This information is of great importance, Grit," said the president. "If, as you say, there are three conspirators, there would be a very good chance of their succeeding in overpowering any messenger, and abstracting the bonds. As it happens, the bonds do not belong to the bank, but to an individual depositor, but it would be very unpleasant and mortifying to have them taken from our messenger. It might lead to a supposition on the part of some that we didn't keep our secrets well, but suffered a matter as important as this to become known outside. Mr. Courtney, what would you advise to be done in such an emergency?"

Courtney always looked important when his advice was asked, and answered promptly:

"It is a very simple matter. Put the messenger on his guard. Supply him with a revolver, if need be, and if he is on the watch he can't be robbed."

Mr. Graves looked thoughtful, and appeared to be turning over this advice in his mind.

"If Mr. Courtney will excuse me," Grit said, "I think there is a better plan than that."

Courtney's lip curled.

"Ask the boy's advice, by all means, Mr. Graves," he said, with a palpable sneer. "It must be very valuable, considering his experience and knowledge of the world."

CHAPTER XXIII

GRIT GIVES IMPORTANT ADVICE

"LET me hear your idea, Grit," said Mr. Graves courteously.

"I have little experience or knowledge of the world," said Grit, "as Mr. Courtney says, or means to say, but it occurs to me to ask whether you have full confidence in your messenger?"

"Of course we have," said Mr. Courtney. "What foolish idea have you got in your head?"

"Tell me why this question occurs to you, Grit?" asked the president.

"I thought it possible that this Colonel Johnson, who employs the conspirators, as you call them, may have learned from the messenger that he was to be entrusted with a valuable package of bonds."

"Why on earth should the messenger reveal this news to a stranger?" demanded Mr. Courtney sharply.

"Because," said Grit quietly, not allowing himself to be disturbed by the sneering tone of the ex-president, "he might be well paid for doing so."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Courtney, but the president of the bank said thoughtfully:

"There may be something in that."

"I am sure the messenger is faithful," asserted Mr. Courtney positively, but it may be remarked that his confidence sprang rather from a desire to discredit Grit's suggestion than from any real belief in the integrity of the bank messenger.

"It isn't best to take this integrity for granted in a matter where a mistake would subject us to serious loss," observed President Graves. "I hope he is reliable, but I do not shut my eyes to the fact that such a price as he might demand for conniving with the conspirators would be a strong temptation to a poor man like Ephraim Carver."

"What are you going to do about it?" asked Courtney. "For my part I am free to confess that I attach very little importance to the astounding discovery of this young man, who knows a good deal more, I presume, about managing a boat than managing a bank."

"You are right there, Mr. Courtney," said Grit good-naturedly. "I don't want Mr. Graves to attach any more importance to my suggestion than he thinks it deserves."

"Whatever your suggestion may be worth, Grit," said the president of the bank, "there can be no doubt that you have brought me news of

great importance. I shall not forget the obligation the bank is under to you."

Mr. Courtney shrugged his shoulders.

"The story looks to me very improbable," he said. "If I were still president of the bank, I should probably dismiss it as an idle fabrication."

"Then, Mr. Courtney," said Mr. Graves emphatically, "permit me to say that you would be wanting in your duty to the bank and its interests."

"I understand the duties of a bank president at least as well as you, Mr. Graves," said Mr. Courtney stiffly. "After that remark you will not be surprised if I bid you good evening."

"Good evening!" said the president quietly, not attempting to call back or placate the offended director.

"Perhaps I had better go, too," said Grit, rising from his chair.

"No, Grit, stay a few minutes longer; I wish to inquire further into this affair."

"Certainly, Mr. Graves, I will stay, with pleasure."

Mr. Courtney heard this fragment of conversation, and it led him to say with pointed sarcasm, as he stood with the knob of the door in his hand:

"Perhaps I had better resign my position, and suggest the young boatman as bank director in my place."

"I doubt whether Grit would consider himself competent to discharge the duties of a director," said Mr. Graves, smiling. "It may come in time."

Mr. Courtney shut the door hastily, and left the room.

"Mr. Courtney is rather a peculiar man; you needn't mind him, Grit," said Mr. Graves, when the ruffled director was gone.

"He doesn't like me very much, nor Phil, either," said Grit. "It is lucky you are president of the bank now, and not he, for there is no humbug about the news I bring you."

"I consider it highly important," said Mr. Graves, "as I have already stated. I am a little puzzled as to what I ought to do in the matter. As you say, the messenger himself may be in the plot. By the way, what put that into your head?"

"I didn't know how otherwise Colonel Johnson could have learned about the bonds being sent up to Boston."

"Frequently the messenger himself is ignorant of the service he is to render, but in this particular instance it happened that I told Mr. Carver that I should have occasion to send him to Boston this week, and for what purpose."

"I am sorry that one who is in any way connected with our family should be concerned in such a plot," said Grit.

"Of course; that is natural. Still, you did your duty in telling me of it. Whatever consequences may follow, you have done right."

"I can't take much credit to myself for that," said Grit, "since I don't like Mr. Brandon, and it would be a great relief both to my mother and myself if he were away."

"As I have already consulted you on this matter, Grit," said the bank president, after a pause, "I am disposed to consult you further. Have you any advice to offer as to the best course to pursue?"

"Yes, sir," answered Grit. "As long as you don't think it presumption in me, I will tell you of a plan I thought of as I was coming here. In the first place, I would send the messenger as usual, without letting him know that he was suspected."

"But that would involve risks, wouldn't it, Grit?" objected Mr. Graves. "We can't afford to lose the bonds."

"I did not intend that he should carry the bonds," continued Grit. "I would make up a parcel, filled with old papers, of about the same size, and let him think he was carrying the bonds."

"So far, so good, but what of the bonds? They would still be here, when we want them delivered in Boston."

"I have thought of that," said Grit promptly.

"Either a little before or a little afterward, I would send them by another messenger."

"Good, Grit! You're a trump!" said the banker, his face lighting up. "It's a capital plan. But one thing you have forgotten. We shall not in this way ascertain whether the messenger is in collusion with the conspirators—that is, not necessarily."

"I think you can, sir. As I understand, this is the way in which the theft will be accomplished: The conspirators will make up a bundle of the same shape as the messenger's and slyly substitute it at some point on the route. They will not openly rob him, for there will be no chance of doing so without attracting attention."

"If the messenger is careful, they could not easily substitute a false for the true package."

"That is true, and that is the reason why I think the messenger is in league with them. If he is careless, the change can easily be made. I understand Brandon and Travers are to receive five thousand dollars each for their services, and Colonel Johnson may, perhaps, have offered the same sum to Mr. Carver."

"It would be a great temptation to a man employed on a small salary like Carver," said Mr. Graves thoughtfully.

"What do you think of my plan, Mr. Graves?" asked Grit.

"I think it a capital one. I shall adopt it in every detail. The only thing that remains is to decide whom to employ to carry the genuine package of bonds to Boston. Do you think of any one?"

Grit shook his head.

"No, sir, I don't know of any one."

"I do," said the president.

"Who is it?" asked Grit, with considerable curiosity.

"I mean to send you!" answered Mr. Graves.

CHAPTER XXIV

WHAT GRIT OVERHEARD BEHIND THE ELM-TREE

GRIT listened with incredulous amazement to the words of the bank president.

"You mean to send me?" he ejaculated.

"Yes," answered Mr. Graves, nodding.

"But I am only a boy!"

"That is true; but you have shown a sagacity and good judgment which justify me in selecting you, young as you are. Of course, I shall take care that you are paid for your time. Now, are you willing to go?"

Willing to go to Boston, where he had not been for five years? Grit did not take long to consider.

"Yes," he answered promptly. "If you are willing to trust me, I am willing to go."

"That is well," said the president. "I need hardly caution you to keep your errand a profound secret."

"Certainly, sir."

"You must not even tell your mother," continued Mr. Graves.

"But she will feel anxious if I go away without a word to her."

"You mistake me. I would not for the world have you give her unnecessary anxiety. You may tell her that you are employed on an errand which may detain you from home a day or two, and ask her not to question you till you return."

"Yes, I can say that," returned Grit. "Mother will likely think Mr. Jackson has employed me."

"Mr. Jackson."

"A gentleman now staying at the hotel. He has always been very kind to me."

If Grit had been boastful or vainglorious, he would have given the particulars of his rescue of little Willie Jackson from drowning. As it was, he said no more than I have recorded above.

"Very well," answered the president. "Your mother will not, at any rate, think you are in any mischief, as she knows you too well for that."

"When do you want me to go, sir?" asked Grit.

"Let me see. To-day is Wednesday, and Friday is the day when we had decided to send the messenger. He was to go by the morning train. I think I will send you off in advance by the evening train of Thursday. Then the bonds will be in the bank at Boston, while the regular messenger is still on the way."

"That will suit me very well, sir."

"The train starts at ten o'clock. You can be at the train at half-past nine. I will be there at the same hour, and will have the bonds with me. I will at the same time provide you with money for the journey."

"All right, sir. Do you want to see me any time to-morrow?"

"No. I think it best that we should not be too much together. Even then, I don't think any one would suspect that I would employ you on such an errand. Still, it will be most prudent not to do anything to arouse suspicion."

"Then, Mr. Graves, I will bid you good night," said Grit, rising. "I thank you very much for the confidence you are going to repose in me. I will do my best, so that you may not have occasion to repent it."

"I don't expect to repent it," said Mr. Graves, shaking hands with Grit in a friendly manner.

When the young boatman left the house of the bank president, it was natural that he should feel a thrill of pride as he thought of the important mission on which he was to be sent. Then, again, it was exhilarating to reflect that he was about to visit Boston. He had lived at Chester for five years or more, and during that time he had once visited Portland. That was an exciting day for him; but Boston, he knew, was a great deal larger

than the beautiful city of which Maine people are pardonably proud, and contained possibilities of pleasure and excitement which filled him with eager anticipations.

But Grit knew that his journey was undertaken not for his own enjoyment, but was to be an important business mission, and he resolved that he would do his duty, even if he did not have a bit of fun.

As he thought over the business on which he was to be employed, his thoughts reverted to Ephraim Carver, the bank messenger, and the more he thought of him the more he suspected that he was implicated in the projected robbery. It was perhaps this thought that led him to make a detour so that he could pass the house of the messenger.

It was a small cottage-house, standing back from the street, from which a narrow lane led to it. Connected with it were four or five acres of land, which might have yielded quite an addition to his income; but Mr. Carver was not very fond of working on land, and he let it lie fallow, making scarcely any use of it. Until he obtained the position of bank messenger he had a hard time getting a living, and was generally regarded as rather a shiftless man. He was connected with the wife of one of the directors, and that was the way in which he secured his position. Now he received a small salary, but one

on which he might have lived comfortably in a cheap place like Chester. But in spite of this he was dissatisfied, and on many occasions complained of the difficulty he experienced in making both ends meet.

Grit turned down the lane and approached the house.

He hardly knew why he did so. He had no expectation of learning anything that would throw light on the question whether Carver was or was not implicated in the conspiracy. Still, he was drawn toward the house.

The night was quite dark, but Grit knew every step of the way, and he walked slowly up the lane, which was probably two hundred feet long.

He had gone perhaps half the distance, when he saw the front door of Carver's house open. Mr. Carver himself could be seen in the doorway with a kerosene lamp in his hand, and at his side was a person whom with a thrill of surprise Grit recognized as the man staying at the hotel under the name of Colonel Johnson.

"That looks suspicious," thought Grit. "I am afraid the messenger is guilty."

He reflected that it would not do for either of them to see him, as it might render them suspicious. He took advantage of the darkness, and the fact that the two were not looking his way, to jump over

the stone wall and hide behind the broad trunk of the lofty elm which stood just in that spot.

"I wish I could hear what they are saying," thought Grit. "Then I should know for certain my suspicions are well founded."

The two men stood at the door for the space of a minute or more, and then the stranger departed, but not alone. Ephraim Carver took his hat and accompanied him, both walking slowly up the lane toward the main road.

By a great piece of good luck, as Grit considered it, they halted beneath the very elm-tree behind which he lay concealed.

These were the first words Grit heard spoken:

"My dear friend," said Johnson, in bland, persuasive accents, "there isn't a particle of danger in it. You have only to follow my directions and all will be well."

"I shall find it hard to explain how it happened that I lost the package," said Carver.

"Not at all! You will have a facsimile in your possession—one so like that no one need wonder that you mistook it for the original. Undoubtedly you will be charged with negligence, but they can't prove anything more against you. You can stand being found fault with for five thousand dollars, can't you?"

"If that is all, I won't mind. I shall probably lose my situation."

"Suppose you do; it brings you in only six hundred dollars a year, while we pay you in one lump five thousand dollars—over eight times as much. Why, man, the interest of this sum at six per cent. will yield half as much as your annual salary."

"The bank people ought to pay me more," said Carver. "Two months since I asked them to raise me to eight hundred a year, but they wouldn't. There was only one of the directors in favor of it—the man who married my wife's cousin."

"They don't appreciate you, friend Carver," said Johnson. "How can they expect you to be honest, when they treat you in so niggardly a manner?"

"Just so," said Carver, eager to find some justification for his intended treachery. "If they paid me a living salary I wouldn't do this thing you ask of me."

"As it is, they have only themselves to blame," said Colonel Johnson

"That's the way I look at it," said the bank messenger.

"And quite right, too! I shouldn't be surprised if you managed to keep your place, after all. They won't suspect you of anything more than carelessness."

"That would be splendid!" returned Carver. "With my salary and the interest of five thousand dollars I could live as comfortably as I wanted to. How soon shall I receive the money?"

"As soon as we can dispose of the bonds safely. It won't be long."

Here the two men parted, and Carver returned to his house.

Grit crept out from behind the elm-tree when the coast was clear and made his way home. He had learned a most important secret, but resolved to communicate it only to Mr. Graves.

CHAPTER XXV

MRS. BRANDON IS MYSTIFIED

WHEN Grit explained to his mother that he was going away for a day or two on a journey, she was naturally surprised, and asked for particulars.

"I should like to tell you, mother," said the young boatman, "but there are reasons why I cannot. It is a secret mission, and the secret is not mine."

"That is perfectly satisfactory, Grit," said Mrs. Brannon. "I have full confidence in you, and know I can trust you."

"After I return I shall probably be able to tell you all," said Grit. "Meanwhile, I shall, no doubt, be paid better than if I were ferrying passengers across the river."

"At any rate, I shall be glad to see you back. We have not been separated for a night for years—or, indeed, since you were born."

The next day Mr. Brandon, taught by experience that he need not look for his meals at home, went

over to the tavern for breakfast. He felt unusually independent and elated, for he had money in his pocket, obtained from Colonel Johnson, and he expected soon to receive the handsome sum of five thousand dollars. A shrewder man, in order to avert suspicion, would have held his tongue, at least until he had performed the service for which he was to be so liberally paid; but Brandon could not forego the opportunity to boast a little.

"It is quite possible, Mrs. B.," he said, in the morning, "that I may leave you in a day or two, to be gone a considerable time."

Mrs. B. did not show the expected curiosity, but received the communication in silence.

"You don't inquire where I am going," said Brandon.

"Where do you propose to go?" asked his wife, whose chief feeling was that she and Grit would now be left to their old quiet and peace.

"I may go to Europe," said Mr. Brandon, in an important tone.

"Isn't this a new plan?" asked Mrs. Brandon, really surprised.

"Yes, it is new. I shall go on business, Mrs. B. My friend Travers and I will probably go together. You and Grit made a great mistake when you treated him with rudeness. It is through him that I am offered most remunerative employment."

"I don't enjoy the society of your friend," said Mrs. Brandon. "If he is likely to give you a chance to earn something, I am glad, but that does not excuse the rudeness with which he treated me."

"My friend Travers is a gentleman, Mrs. B., a high-toned gentleman, and if you had treated him with the respect which is his due you would have had nothing to complain of. As it is, you may soon discover that you have made a mistake and lost a great pleasure. I had not intended to tell you, but I am tempted to do so, that but for your impoliteness to Travers I might have taken you and Grit with me on a European tour."

Mr. Brandon watched his wife, to see if she exhibited severe disappointment at the dazzling prospect which was no sooner shown than withdrawn, but she showed her usual equanimity.

"Grit and I will be quite as happy at home," she answered.

"Sour grapes!" thought Brandon; but he was wrong. A tour of Europe taken in his company would have had no attractions for his wife.

"Very well," said Brandon. "You and Grit are welcome to the charms of Pine Point. As for me, it is too small and contracted for a man of my business capacity."

"I wonder whether there is any truth in what he says," thought Mrs. Brandon, puzzled.

"Your business seems a profitable one," she ventured to remark.

"It is, Mrs. B.," answered her husband. "It is of an unusually delicate nature, and requires business talents of a high order."

"Your friend Travers does not impress one as a man possessed of a high order of business talent," said Mrs. Brandon.

"That is where you fail to appreciate him, but I cannot say more. My business is secret, and cannot be revealed."

So saying, Brandon took his hat, and with a jaunty step walked to the hotel.

"More secrecy!" thought Mrs. Brandon. "Grit tells me that his mission is a secret one, and now Mr. Brandon says he, too, is engaged in something that cannot be revealed. I know that it is all right with Grit, but I do not feel so sure about Mr. Brandon."

The day passed as usual. Grit plied his boat on the river and did a fair day's work. But about four o'clock he came home.

"You are home early, Grit," said his mother.

"Yes, for I must get ready to go."

He had not yet mentioned to his mother when he was to start.

"Do you go to-morrow morning?" asked Mrs. Brandon.

"I go to-night, and may be away for a couple of days, mother."

Mrs. Brandon uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"I suppose I must not ask you where you are going?" said his mother.

"I cannot tell, for it is somebody else's secret. One thing more, will you take care to say as little as possible about my going away? I would rather Mr. Brandon should not know of it."

"I will do as you wish, Grit. By the way, Mr. Brandon tells me he is soon going to Europe."

Grit smiled. He knew where the money was to come from which his stepfather depended upon to defray the expenses of a foreign journey.

"I don't feel sure about his going, mother," he answered.

"He said he would have taken you and me if we had treated his friend Travers more politely."

"Well, mother, we must reconcile ourselves as well as we can to staying at home."

"Home will be happy while I have you with me, Grit."

"And Mr. Brandon away," added the young boatman.

"Yes; I can't help hoping that he will be able to carry out his purpose and go to Europe, or somewhere else as far off."

"I think it very likely we shan't see him again for some time," said Grit, "though I don't think he will be traveling in Europe."

"As you and Mr. Brandon are both to be engaged in business of a secret nature," said Mrs. Brandon, smiling, "I don't know but I ought to follow your example."

"I have full confidence in you, mother, whatever you undertake," said Grit, with a laugh, repeating his mother's own words.

Evening came on, and Grit stole out of the house early, lest his stepfather might by some chance return home and suspect something from his unusual journey.

He need not have been alarmed, for Brandon did not leave the tavern till ten o'clock, though he, too, expected to leave town the next morning.

When he returned he didn't inquire for Grit, whom he supposed to be abed and asleep.

"Mrs. B.," he said, "I must trouble you to wake me at seven o'clock to-morrow morning. I am going to take the early train to Portland."

"Very well."

"And as it will be rather inconvenient for me to go out to breakfast, I would be glad if you would give me some breakfast before I go."

"I will do so," said his wife.

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"It may be some time before I see you again, as I am to go away on business."

"I hope you may be successful," said Mrs. Brandon.

Brandon laughed queerly.

"If the old lady knew that I was going to steal some government bonds she would hesitate a little before she wished me success," he thought; but he said:

"Thank you, Mrs. B.; your good wishes are appreciated, and I may hereafter be able to show my appreciation in a substantial way. I suppose Grit is asleep?"

Mrs. Brandon did not answer, finding the question an embarrassing one.

The next morning Brandon, contrary to his wont, showed considerable alacrity in dressing, and did justice to the breakfast his wife had set before him.

"Well, good-by, Mrs. B.," he said, as he took his hat and prepared to leave the house. "Perhaps I had better go upstairs and bid good-by to Grit, as I may not see him again for some time."

"Grit is out," said Mrs. Brandon, hastily, for she did not wish her husband to go up to Grit's room, as he would discover that his bed had not been slept in.

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"Out already?" said Brandon. "He's made an early start. Well, bid him good-by for me."

"It's very strange," repeated Mrs. Brandon, as she cleared away the breakfast dishes; "there's Grit gone, I don't know where, and now Mr. Brandon has started off on some mysterious business. What can it all mean?"

CHAPTER XXVI

THE FALL RIVER MANUFACTURER

GRIT lost no time in prosecuting his journey. In Portland he found that he should need to stay over a few hours, and repaired to the United States Hotel. He left word to be called early, as he wished to take a morning train to Boston.

At the breakfast-table he found himself sitting next to a man of swarthy complexion and bushy black whiskers.

"Good morning, my young friend," said the stranger, after a scrutinizing glance.

"Good morning, sir," said Grit, politely.

"Are you stopping at this hotel?"

"For the present, yes," answered the young boatman.

"Are you going farther?"

"I think of it," said Grit, cautiously.

"Perhaps you are going to Boston?" proceeded the stranger.

"I may do so," Grit admitted.

"I am glad of it, for I am going, too. If agreeable, we will travel in company."

"I suppose we shall go on the same train?" said Grit, evasively.

"Just so. I am going to Boston on business. You, I suppose, are too young to have business of any importance?"

"Boys of my age seldom have business of importance," said Grit, resolved to baffle the evident curiosity of the stranger.

"Exactly. I suppose you have relations in Boston?"

"I once lived in that neighborhood," said Grit.

"Just so. Are you going to stay long in the city?"

"That depends on circumstances."

"Do you live in this State?"

"At present I do."

The man looked a little annoyed, for he saw that Grit was determined to say as little about himself as possible. He decided to set the boy an example of frankness.

"I do not live in Maine," he said; "I am a manufacturer in Fall River, Mass. I suppose you have heard of Fall River?"

"Oh, yes!"

"It is a right smart place, as a Philadelphian

would say. You never heard of Townsend's Woolen Mill, I dare say?"

"No, I never have."

"It is one of the largest mills in Fall River. I own a controlling interest in it. I assure you I wouldn't take a hundred thousand dollars for my interest in it."

"You ought to be in very easy circumstances," said Grit, politely, though it did occur to him to wonder why the owner of a controlling interest in a large woolen mill should be attired in such a rusty suit.

"I am," said the stranger, complacently. "Daniel Townsend's income—I am Daniel T., at your service—for last year was twelve thousand three hundred and sixty-nine dollars."

"This gentleman seems very communicative," thought Grit.

"Your income was rather larger than mine," he said.

"Ho, ho! I should say so," laughed Mr. Townsend. "Are you in any business, my young friend?"

"I am connected with navigation," said Grit.

"Indeed?" observed Townsend, appearing puzzled. "Do you find it a paying business?"

"Tolerably so, but I presume woolen manufacturing is better?"

"Just so," assented Townsend, rather absently.

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At this point Grit rose from the table, having finished his breakfast.

"Mr. Townsend seems very social," thought our hero, "but I think he is given to romancing. I don't believe he has anything more to do with a woolen mill in Fall River than I have."

Grit reached the station in time and took his seat in the train. He bought a morning paper and began to read.

"Ah, here you are, my young friend!" fell on his ears, just after they passed Saco, and Grit, looking up, saw his breakfast companion.

"Is the seat beside you taken?" asked Mr. Daniel Townsend.

Grit would like to have said "yes," but he was compelled to admit that it was unengaged.

"So much the better for me," said the woolen manufacturer, and he sat down beside our hero.

He had with him a small, well-worn valise, which looked as if in some remote period it had seen better days. He laid it down, and, looking keenly about, observed Grit's parcel, which, though commonplace in appearance, contained, as we know, thirty thousand dollars in government bonds.

"It is rather a long ride to Boston," said Mr. Townsend.

"Yes; but it seems shorter when you have something to read," answered Grit, looking wistfully

at his paper, which he would have preferred reading to listening to the conversation of his neighbor.

"I never care to read on the cars," said Mr. Townsend. "I think it is injurious to the eyes. Do you ever find it so?"

"I have not traveled enough to be able to judge," said Grit.

"Very likely. At your age I traveled a good deal. My father was a rich merchant, and, as I was fond of roving, he sent me on a voyage to the Mediterranean on one of his vessels. I was sixteen at that time."

"I wonder whether this is true or not?" thought Grit.

"I enjoyed the trip, though I was seasick on the Mediterranean. It is really more trying than the ocean, though you might not imagine it. Don't you think you would enjoy a trip of that sort?"

"Yes, I am sure I would," said Grit, with interest.

"Just so; most boys of your age are fond of traveling. Perhaps I might find it in my way to gratify your wishes. Our corporation is thinking of sending out a traveler to Europe. You are rather young, but still I might be able to get it for you."

"You know so little about me," said Grit, sen-

sibly, "that I wonder you should think of me in any such connection."

"That is true. I know nothing of you, except what you have told me."

"That isn't much," thought Grit.

"And it may be necessary for me to know more. I will ask you a few questions, and report your answers to our directors at their meeting next week."

"Thank you, sir; but I think we will postpone discussing the matter this morning."

"Is any time better than the present?" inquired Townsend.

Grit did not care to say much about himself until after he had fulfilled his errand in the city. He justly felt that with such an important charge it was necessary for him to use the greatest caution and circumspection. Still, there was a bare possibility that the man beside him was really what he claimed to be, and might have it in his power to give him a business commission which he would enjoy.

"If you will call on me at the Parker House this evening," said Grit, "I will speak with you on the subject."

"Whom shall I inquire for?" asked the Fall River manufacturer.

"You need not inquire for any one. You will find me in the reading-room at eight o'clock."

"Very well," answered Mr. Townsend, appearing satisfied.

The conversation drifted along till they reached Exeter.

Then Mr. Townsend rose in haste and, seizing Grit's bundle instead of his own, hurried toward the door.

Grit sprang after him and snatched the precious package.

"You have made a mistake, Mr. Townsend," he said, eying his late seat companion with distrust.

"Why, so I have!" ejaculated Townsend, in apparent surprise. "By Jove! it's lucky you noticed it. That little satchel of mine contains some papers and certificates of great value."

"In that case I would advise you to be more careful," said Grit, who did not believe one word of the last statement.

"So I will," said Townsend, taking the satchel. "I am going into the smoking-car. Won't you go with me?"

"No, thank you."

"I have a spare cigar," urged Townsend.

"Thank you again, but I don't smoke."

"Oh, well, you're right, no doubt, but it's an old habit of mine. I began to smoke when I was twelve years old. My wife often tells me I am injuring my health, and perhaps I am. Take the

advice of a man old enough to be your father, and don't smoke."

"That's good advice, sir, and I shall probably follow it."

"Well, good day, if we don't meet again," said Townsend.

Mr. Townsend, instead of passing into the smoking-car, got off the train. Grit observed this, and was puzzled to account for it, particularly as the train started on, leaving him standing on the platform.

A few minutes later the conductor passed through the train, calling for tickets.

Grit looked in vain for his, and, deciding that he should have to pay the fare over again, he felt for his pocketbook, but that, too, was missing.

He began to understand why Mr. Townsend left the train at Exeter.

CHAPTER XXVII

A FRIEND IN NEED

THE conductor waited while Grit was searching for his ticket. He was not the same one who had started with the train, so that he could not know whether our hero had shown a ticket earlier in the journey.

"I can't find my ticket or my money," said Grit, perplexed.

"Then you will have to leave the train at the next station," said the conductor, suspiciously.

"It is very important that I should proceed on my journey," pleaded Grit. "I will give you my name and send you the money."

"That won't do, youngster," said the conductor, roughly. "I have heard of that game before. It won't go down."

"There is no game about it," said Grit. "My ticket and pocketbook have been stolen."

"Of course," sneered the conductor. "Perhaps you can point out the thief?"

"No, I can't, for he has left the train. He got out at Exeter."

"Very likely. You can take the next train back and find him."

"Do you doubt that I had a ticket?" asked Grit, nettled by the conductor's evident incredulity.

"Yes, I do, if you want the truth. You want to steal a ride—that's what's the matter."

"That is not true," said Grit. "I am sure some of these passengers have seen me show my ticket. Didn't you, sir?"

He addressed this question to a stout old gentleman who sat in the seat behind him.

"Really, I couldn't say," answered the old gentleman addressed. "I was reading my paper, and didn't take notice."

The conductor looked more incredulous than ever.

"I can't waste any more time with you, young man," he said. "At the next station you must get out."

Grit was very much disturbed. It was not pleasant to be left penniless at a small station, but if he had been left alone he would not have cared so much. But to have the custody of thirty thousand dollars' worth of government bonds, under such circumstances, was certainly embarrassing. He could not get along without money, and for a

tramp without money to be in charge of such a treasure was ample cause of suspicion.

What could he do?

The train was already going slower, and it was evident that the next station was near at hand.

Grit was trying in vain to think of some way of securing a continuation of his journey, when a stout, good-looking lady of middle age, who sat just opposite, rose from her seat and seated herself beside him.

"You seem to be in trouble," she said kindly.

"Yes, ma'am," answered Grit. "My ticket and money have been stolen, and the conductor threatens to put me off the train."

"So I heard. Who do you think robbed you?"

"The man who sat beside me and got out at Exeter."

"I noticed him. I wonder you didn't detect him in the act of robbing you."

"So do I," answered Grit. "He must be a professional. All the same, I am ashamed of being so taken in."

"I heard you say it was important for you to reach Boston."

"It is," said Grit.

He was about to explain why, when it occurred to him that it would not be prudent in a crowded car, which might contain suspicious and unprinci-

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pled persons, to draw attention to the nature of his packet.

"I can't explain why just at present," he said; "but if any one would lend me money to keep on my journey I would willingly repay the loan two for one."

At this point the train came to a stop, and the conductor, passing through the car, addressed Grit:

"Young man, you must get off at this station."

"No, he needn't," said the stout lady, decidedly. "Here, my young friend, pay your fare out of this," and she drew from a pearl portemonnaie a ten-dollar bill.

Grit's heart leaped for joy—it was such an intense relief.

"How can I ever thank you?" he said gratefully, as he offered the change to his new friend.

"No," she said; "keep the whole. You will need it, and you can repay me whenever you find it convenient."

"That will be as soon as I get home," said Grit, promptly. "I have the money there."

"That will be entirely satisfactory."

"Let me know your name and address, madam," said Grit, taking out a small memorandum-book, "so that I may know where to send."

"Mrs. Jane Bancroft, No. 37 Mount Vernon Street," said the lady.

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Grit noted it down.

"Let me tell you mine," he said. "My name is Harry Morris, and I live in the town of Chester, in Maine."

"Chester? I know that place. I have a cousin living there, or, rather, I should say, a cousin of my late husband."

"Who is it, Mrs. Bancroft?" asked Grit. "I know almost everybody in the village."

"Mr. Courtney. I believe he has something to do with the bank."

"Yes, he is a director. He was once president."

"Exactly. Do you know him?"

"Yes, ma'am. I saw him only a day or two before I left."

"I presume you know his son Philip, also?"

"Oh, yes, I know Phil," said Grit.

"Is he a friend of yours?" asked the lady curiously.

"No, I can't say that. We don't care much for each other."

"And whose fault is that?" asked the lady, smiling.

"I don't think it is mine. I have always treated Phil well enough, but he doesn't think me a suitable associate for him."

"Why?"

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"Because I am poor, while he is the son of a rich man."

"That is as it may be," said the lady, shrugging her shoulders. "Money sometimes has wings. So you are not rich?"

"I have to work for a living."

"What do you do?"

"I ferry passengers across the Kennebec, and in that way earn a living for my mother and myself."

"Do you make it pay?"

"I earn from seven to ten dollars a week."

"That is doing very well for a boy of your age. What sort of a boy is Phil? Is he popular?"

"I don't think he is."

"Why?"

"He is your nephew, Mrs. Bancroft, and I don't like to criticize him."

"Never mind that. Speak freely."

"He puts on too many airs to be popular. If he would just forget that his father is a rich man, and meet the rest of the boys on an equality, I think we should like him well enough."

"That is just the opinion I have formed of him. Last winter he came to make me a visit, but I found him hard to please. He wanted a great deal of attention, and seemed disposed to order my servants about, till I was obliged to check him."

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"I remember hearing him say he was going to visit a rich relative in Boston," said Grit.

Mrs. Bancroft smiled.

"It was all for his own gratification, no doubt," she said. "So your name is Harry Morris?"

"Yes, but I am usually called Grit."

"A good omen. It is a good thing for any boy—especially a poor boy—to possess grit. Most of our successful men were poor boys, and most of them possessed this quality."

"You encourage me, Mrs. Bancroft," said our hero. "I want to succeed in life, for my mother's sake, especially."

"I think you will; I have little knowledge of you, but you seem like one born to prosper. How long are you going to stay in Boston?"

"Till to-morrow, at any rate."

"You will be in the city overnight, then. Where did you think of staying?"

"At the Parker House."

"It is an expensive hotel. You had better stay at my house."

"At your house?" exclaimed Grit, surprised.

"Yes; I may want to ask you more questions about Chester. We have tea at half-past six. That will give you plenty of time to attend to your business. I shall be at home any time after half-past five. Will you come?"

"With pleasure," said Grit, politely.

"Then I will expect you."

Mrs. Bancroft returned to her seat. Our hero mentally congratulated himself on making so agreeable and serviceable a friend.

"What will Phil say when he learns that I have been the guest of his fashionable relatives in Boston?" thought he.

In due time the train reached Boston, and Grit lost no time in repairing to the bank.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE TRAIN ROBBERY

WHEN Grit had delivered the bonds at the bank a great load seemed to be lifted from his shoulders. Especially after he had been robbed on the train, he realized the degree of risk and responsibility involved in the custody of so valuable a packet.

The officials at the bank seemed surprised at the youth of the messenger, but Grit felt at liberty to explain why he was selected as a substitute for the regular messenger.

Leaving our hero for a time, we go back to Chester to speak of other characters in our story.

Ephraim Carver, the bank messenger, went to the bank at the hour of opening to receive the package of bonds which he expected to convey to Boston. He had no suspicion that his negotiations of a previous evening had been overheard and reported to the president. He felt somewhat nervous, it is true, for he felt that a few hours would make him a rich man. Then the risk involved,

though he did not consider it to be great, was yet sufficient to excite him.

He was admitted into the president's room, as usual.

Mr. Graves was already in his office, but his manner was his ordinary one, and the messenger did not dream that the quiet official read him through and through and understood him thoroughly.

"You know, I suppose, Mr. Carver," said President Graves, "that you are to go to Boston by the next train?"

"Yes, sir."

"The packet you will carry is of unusual value, and requires an unusual degree of care and caution."

"Yes, sir."

"It contains thirty thousand dollars in government bonds," said the president, laying his hand on the prepared packet, which was in the usual form. "That is a fortune in itself," he added, closely scrutinizing the face of the messenger. He thought he detected a transient gleam of exultation in the eyes of the bank messenger.

"Of course," he proceeded, "if it were known that you carried a packet of such value there would be great danger of your being robbed. Indeed, you might be in some personal danger."

"Yes, sir."

"But, as it is only known to you and the officers of the bank, there is no special danger. Still, I advise you to be more than usually vigilant, on account of the value of your charge."

"Oh, yes, sir, I shall take good care of it," answered Carver, reaching out his hand for the packet.

"Let me see, how long have you been in the employ of the bank?" asked the president.

"Nearly three years, sir."

"You have found it a light, easy position, have you not?"

"Yes, sir; though, if you will allow me to say so, the salary is small."

"True; but the expenses of living in Chester are small, also. However, we will not discuss that question now. Possibly at the end of the year, if they continue satisfied with you, the directors may increase your salary slightly. There cannot be a large increase."

"I may not need an increase then," thought Carver. "With five thousand dollars to fall back upon, I shall feel independent."

"You will report to me when you return," said Mr. Graves, as the messenger left the bank parlor.

"Yes, sir, directly."

The president fixed his eyes upon the vanishing figure of the messenger, and said to himself:

"My friend, you have deliberately planned your own downfall. Greed of money has made you dishonest; but your plans are destined to miscarry, as this time to-morrow you and your confederates will be made aware."

"Now," thought the bank messenger, as he bent his steps toward the railway station, "the path is clear. Here is what will completely change my fortunes and lift me from an humble dependent to a comfortable position in life."

Then he thought, with some dissatisfaction, that he was to receive but one-sixth of the value of the bonds, and that the man who employed him to betray his trust would be much more richly repaid. However, in his case, there would be no risk of being personally implicated. No one could prove that he had allowed himself to be robbed. Even if suspicion fastened upon him, nothing could be proved. So, on the whole, perhaps it was better to be content with one-sixth than to incur greater risk and the dread penalty of imprisonment for a term of years.

On the railroad platform Carver glanced furtively about him. He easily recognized Brandon and Travers, who stood side by side, each having provided himself with a ticket. They on their side

also glanced swiftly at him, and then turned away with a look of indifference. But they had not failed to notice the important package which the bank messenger carried in his hand.

"It is all right!" was the thought that passed through their minds.

There was another passenger waiting for the train, whom they did not notice. He was a small, quiet, unpretentious-looking man, attired in a suit of pepper and salt, and looked like a retail merchant in a small way, going to Portland or Boston to order goods. They would have been very much startled had they known that it was a Boston detective, who had been telegraphed for by Mr. Graves, and that his special business was to follow them and observe their actions.

When the train reached the station, Carver got in and took a seat by himself in the second car. Just behind him sat the two confederates, Brandon and Travers, and in line with them, on the opposite side of the car, sat the quiet man, whom we will call Denton.

Ten minutes before the train reached Portland, Ephraim Carver left his seat, and very singularly forgot to take the parcel, of which he had special custody, with him. It was a remarkable piece of forgetfulness, truly.

But his oversight was not unobserved. Travers

sprang from his seat, took the parcel, and, following the messenger, overtook him at the door of the car.

He tapped Carver on the shoulder, and the latter turned round.

"I beg pardon," said Travers, "but you left this on the seat."

As he spoke he handed a packet to Carver.

"I thousand thanks!" said the messenger, hurriedly. "I was very careless. I am very much indebted to you."

"I thought the packet might contain something valuable," said Travers.

"At any rate, I should not like to lose it," said the messenger, who appeared to be properly on his guard.

"Oh, don't mention it," said Travers, politely, and he walked back and resumed his seat beside Brandon.

The quiet man, to whom we have already referred, noted this little piece of acting with a smile of enjoyment.

"Very well done, good people," he said to himself. "It ought to succeed, but it won't."

His sharp eyes had detected what the other passengers had not—that Travers had skilfully substituted another package for the one he had picked up from the seat vacated by Carver.

Carver passed on into the next car, and Denton now concentrated his attention upon Brandon and Travers.

He noticed in both traces of joyful excitement, for which he could easily account. They thought they had succeeded, and each mentally congratulated himself on the acquisition of a neat little fortune.

"They will get out at Portland," thought Denton, "and take account of their booty. I should like to be there to see, but I am instructed to follow my friend the bank messenger to Boston, and must, therefore, forego the pleasure."

At Portland, Brandon and Travers got out of the cars and took a hack to the Falmouth Hotel.

They went to the office and, calling for the hotel register, carefully scanned the list of arrivals.

The afternoon previous they found entered the name of Colonel Johnson.

"Is Colonel Johnson in?" asked Brandon.

"We will ascertain," was the reply.

The bell-boy who was dispatched to inquire returned with the message that Colonel Johnson would see the gentlemen.

They followed the attendant to a room on the third floor, where they found their employer pacing the room in visible excitement.

"Give me the parcel," he said in a peremptory tone.

He cut the strings and hastily opened the coveted prize.

But his eager look was succeeded by black disappointment as, instead of the bonds, he saw a package of blank paper of about the same shape and size.

"Confusion!" he ejaculated; "what does this mean? What devil's mess have you made out of the business?"

CHAPTER XXIX

THE CONSPIRATORS ARE PERPLEXED

JOHNSON'S hasty exclamation was heard with blank amazement by his two confederates.

"What do you mean, colonel? Ain't the bonds there?" asked Travers.

"Do you call these bonds?" demanded Johnson, savagely, as he pointed to the neatly folded brown paper. "You must have brought back your own parcel, and left the genuine one with the bank messenger."

"No," said Travers, shaking his head; "our package was filled with old newspapers. This is different."

"It is evidently only a dummy. Was it the only parcel Carver had?"

"Yes, it was the only one."

"Is it possible the villain has fooled us?" said Johnson, frowning ominously. "If he has, we'll get even with him—I swear it!"

"I don't know what to think, colonel," said

Travers. "You can tell better than I, for you saw him about this business."

"He didn't seem like it, for he caught at my suggestion greedily. There's another possibility," added Johnson, after a pause, with a searching glance at his two confederates. "How do I know but you two have secured the bonds and palmed off this dummy upon me?"

Both men hastily disclaimed doing anything of the kind, and Johnson was forced to believe them, not from any confidence he felt in them, but from his conviction that they were not astute enough to think of any such treachery.

"This must be looked into," he said slowly. "There has been treachery somewhere. It lies between you and the messenger, though I did not dream that either would be up to such a thing."

"You don't think the bank people did it, do you?" suggested Brandon.

"I don't know," said Johnson, slowly. "I can't understand how they could learn what was in the wind, unless one of you three blabbed."

Of course, Travers and Brandon asseverated stoutly that they had not breathed a word to any third party.

Johnson was deeply perplexed, and remained silent for five minutes.

At length he announced his decision.

"We can do nothing, and decide upon nothing," he said, "till we see Carver. He went on to Boston, I conclude?"

"Yes, sir."

"He will be back to-morrow. We must watch the trains and intercept him."

Leaving this worthy trio in Portland, we follow Ephraim Carver to Boston. As the cars sped on their way, he felt an uneasy excitement as he thought of his treachery, and he feared he should look embarrassed when he was called to account by the Boston bank officials. But there was a balm in the thought of the substantial sum he was to receive as the reward of his wrong-doing. That, he thought, would well repay him for the bad quarter of an hour he would pass in Boston.

"Five thousand dollars! Five thousand dollars!" This was the burden of his thoughts as he considered the matter. "It will make me independent. If I can keep my post, I will, and I can then afford to be faithful to the bank. If they discharge me, I will move away, for my living without work, and having money to spend, would attract suspicion if I continued to live in Chester. Somewhere else I can go into business for myself. I might stock a small dry-goods store, for instance. I must inquire into the chances of making a living at that business."

So, in spite of his treachery, Ephraim Carver, on the whole, indulged in pleasing reflections, so that the railroad journey seemed short.

Arrived in Boston, he found that he had just time to go to the bank and deliver his parcel within banking hours.

"I may as well do it, and have it over with," he said to himself.

So, with a return of his nervousness, which he tried to conceal by outward indifference, he made his way to the bank to which he was commissioned.

He had been there before, and was recognized when he entered.

He was at once conducted into the presence of the president.

To him he delivered the parcel of bonds.

"That will do, Mr. Carver," said the president. "You may go outside while I examine them."

He was ushered into the ordinary room, and waited five minutes. He was trying to brace himself for an outburst of surprise, perhaps of stormy indignation, and searching cross-examination, when the president presented himself at the door of his private office.

"That will do," he said. "You can go, Mr. Carver."

Carver stared at him in blank amazement. This was precisely what he did not expect.

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"Have you examined the bonds?" he asked.

"Of course," answered the president.

"And you find them all right?" continued the messenger, with irrepressible surprise.

"I suppose so," answered the president. "I will examine more carefully presently."

"Then you don't wish me to stay?" inquired Carver.

"No; there is no occasion to do so."

Ephraim Carver left the bank in a state of stupefaction.

"What can it all mean?" he asked himself. "The man must be blind as a bat if he didn't discover that the package contained no bonds. I don't believe he opened it at all."

So Carver was left in a state of uncertainty. On the whole, he wished that the substitution had been discovered, so that the president could have had it out with him. Now he felt that a sword was impending over his head, which might fall at any time. This was unpleasant, for he did not know what to expect.

He went back to Portland by a late train, however, as he had arranged to do.

At the depot he met Colonel Johnson. He was puzzled to find that Johnson did not look as jubilant as he anticipated, now that their plot had suc-

ceeded. On the other hand, he looked grave and stern.

"Well, colonel, how goes it?" he asked.

"That is for you to say," returned Johnson.

"You have seen Brandon and Travers, I suppose?"

"Yes, I have seen them."

"Then it's all right, and the parcel is in your hands."

"He takes it pretty coolly," thought Johnson. "I can't understand what it means. I must get to the bottom of this thing. Well, how did they take it at the bank?" he added, aloud. "Did they make any fuss?"

"No," answered the bank messenger.

Johnson was surprised.

"They didn't question you about the parcel you brought them?"

"No; they told me it was all right, and let me go."

"Then they must have got the bonds," said Johnson, hastily.

"What! haven't you got them?" asked the messenger, in genuine surprise.

"No," said Johnson, bitterly. "The fools brought me a package stuffed with sheets of brown paper."

Carver stared at him in open-mouthed amazement.

"I don't understand it," he said. "I can't account for any parcel of the kind."

"They couldn't have made the exchange at all. This must have been their own parcel."

"No," said Carver; "theirs was stuffed with old newspapers."

"That was what they said."

"They told the truth. I helped them make up the parcel myself."

"Then it must have been their parcel that is now in the hands of the bank."

"It seems likely."

"Then where are the bonds?" demanded Johnson, sternly.

"That is more than I can tell," said the bank messenger, in evident perplexity.

"It's enough to make a man tear his hair to have such a promising scheme miscarry," said Johnson, gloomily. "I wish I could lay my finger on the man that's responsible for it."

"I can't understand it at all, colonel. We followed out your instructions to the letter. Everything went off smoothly."

"Can you tell me where are the bonds?" interrupted Johnson, harshly.

"No, I can't."

"Then you may as well be silent."

"I will follow your directions," said Carver, submissively. "What do you wish me to do?"

Johnson reflected a moment. Finally he said:

"Take the earliest morning train to Chester. I will stay here. So will the other two men."

"Anything further?"

"Only this: Keep your eyes and ears open when you get home. If you hear anything that will throw light on this affair, write or telegraph, or send a special messenger, so that I may act promptly on your information. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir. Your directions shall be followed. I am as anxious as you are to find out why we failed."

CHAPTER XXX

GRIT IS BETRAYED

IN sending Grit to Boston instead of the regular messenger, President Graves had acted on his own responsibility, as he had a right to do, since it was a matter to be decided by the executive. He might, indeed, have consulted the directors, but that would have created delay and might have endangered the needful secrecy. When, however, Grit returned and reported to him that his mission had been satisfactorily accomplished, he informed the directors of what had been done, at a special meeting summoned at his own house. All approved the action except Mr. Courtney, who was prejudiced against Grit, and, moreover, felt offended because his own counsel had not been asked or regarded.

"It seems to me," he said, with some heat, "that our president has acted in a very rash manner."

"How do you make that out, Mr. Courtney?" interrogated that official.

"It was actually foolhardy to trust a boy like Grit Morris with a package of such value."

"Why?" inquired Graves.

"Why? He is only a common boy, who makes a living by ferrying passengers across the river.

"Does that prevent his being honest?"

"A valuable package like that would be a powerful temptation to a boy like that," asserted Courtney.

"The package was promptly delivered," said Mr. Graves, dryly.

"He says so," sneered Courtney.

"Pardon me, Mr. Courtney, I have had advice to that effect from the Boston bank," said the president, blandly.

"Well, I'm glad the danger has been averted," said Courtney, rather discomfited. "All the same, I blame your course as hazardous and injudicious. I suppose the boy was afraid to appropriate property of so much value."

"I think, Mr. Courtney, you do injustice to Grit," said Mr. Saunders, another director. "I am satisfied that he is strictly honest."

"Perhaps you'd be in favor of appointing him regular bank messenger," said Courtney, with a sneer.

"I should certainly prefer him to Ephraim Carver."

"I consider Carver an honest man."

"And I have positive proof that he is not hon-

est," said the president. "I have proof, moreover, that he was actually in league with the man who plotted to rob the bank."

This statement made a sensation, and the president proceeded:

"Indeed, I have called this extra meeting partly to suggest the necessity of appointing in Carver's place a man in whom we can repose confidence."

Here he detailed briefly the conversation which Grit overheard between the bank messenger and Colonel Johnson. It impressed all except Mr. Courtney.

"All a fabrication of that boy, I'll be bound," he declared. "I am surprised, Mr. Graves, that you should have been humbugged by such a palpable invention."

"What could have been the boy's object in inventing such a story, allow me to ask, Mr. Courtney?"

"Oh, he wanted to worm himself into our confidence," said Courtney. "Very likely he wished to be appointed bank messenger, though that would, of course, be preposterous."

"Gentlemen," said President Graves, "as my course does not seem to command entire approval, I will ask those of you who think I acted with discretion to signify it."

All voted in the affirmative except Mr. Courtney.

"I regret, Mr. Courtney, that you disapprove my course," said the president; "but I continue to think it wise, and am glad that your fellow-directors side with me."

Soon after the meeting dissolved, and Mr. Courtney went home very much dissatisfied.

Nothing was done about the appointment of a new messenger, the matter being postponed for three days.

When Mr. Courtney went home he did a very unwise thing. He inveighed in the presence of his family against the course of President Graves, though it was a matter that should have been kept secret. He found one to sympathize with him—his son Phil.

"You don't mean to say," exclaimed that young man, "that Grit Morris was sent to Boston in charge of thirty thousand dollars in bonds?"

"Yes, I do. That is just what was done."

"It's a wonder he didn't steal them and make himself scarce."

"That is in substance what I said at the meeting of the directors, my son."

"I wish they'd sent me," said Phil. "I should have enjoyed the trip."

"It would certainly have been more appropri-

ate," said Mr. Courtney, "as you are the son of one of the directors, and not the least influential or prominent, I flatter myself."

"To take a common boatman!" said Phil, scornfully. "Why, Mr. Graves must be crazy!"

"He is certainly a very injudicious man," said his father.

"Do you believe Carver to be dishonest, father?"

"No, I don't, though Graves does, on some evidence trumped up by the boy Grit. He wants to supersede him, and it would not at all surprise me if he should be in favor of appointing Grit."

"How ridiculous! What is the pay?" asked Phil.

"Six hundred dollars a year, I believe," said Courtney.

"Can't you get it for me?" asked Phil, eagerly.

"I don't think it would be suitable to appoint a boy," returned Courtney. "That is my objection to Grit."

"Surely I would be a better messenger than a common boy like that."

"Of course, you come of a very different family. Still, I prefer a man, and indeed I am in favor of retaining Ephraim Carver."

Phil would really have liked the office of bank messenger. He was tired of studying, and would have found it very agreeable to have an income of

his own. He got considerable sums from his father, but not sufficient for his needs, or, rather his wishes. Besides, like most boys of his age, he enjoyed traveling about, and considered the office a light and pleasant one.

"What a fool Graves must be," he said to himself, "to think of a common boatman for such a place! He'd better stick to his boat, it's all he's qualified for. I'd like to put a spoke in his wheel."

He left the house, and a short distance up the street he met Ephraim Carver, who had come back to town in obedience to Colonel Johnson's suggestion, to learn what he could about the mysterious package.

"I'll see what I can learn from him," thought Phil.

"Good morning, Mr. Carver," he said.

"Good morning, Philip."

"You've been to Boston lately, haven't you?"

"I wonder whether he has heard anything about the matter from his father?" thought Carver.

"Yes," he answered.

"You didn't happen to see Grit Morris there, did you?" asked Phil.

"Grit Morris!" exclaimed Carver, in genuine surprise.

"Yes. Didn't you know he had been to Boston?"

"No. What business had he in Boston?"

"None of his own," answered Phil, significantly.

"Did any one send him?"

"You had better ask Mr. Graves," said Phil, telling more than he intended to.

"Why didn't Mr. Graves get me to attend to his business?" asked Carver, still in the dark.

"I didn't say Graves had any business of his own. He is president of the bank, you know."

"But I attend to the bank business. I am the messenger."

"Perhaps you don't attend to all of it," said Phil, telling considerably more than he intended when the conversation commenced.

"Tell me what you know, Phil, about this matter. It is important for me to know," said Carver, coaxingly. "I know you don't like Grit, neither do I. If he is trying to curry favor with Mr. Graves, I want to know it, so as to circumvent him."

Before Phil quite knew what he was saying he had revealed everything to Carver, adding that Grit was after his place.

The bank messenger now understood why the package entrusted to him was a dummy, and who carried the real package. He lost no time in sending information to Colonel Johnson, in Portland.

The gentleman was very much excited when he learned in what way he had been circumvented.

"So it was a boy, was it?" he said savagely. "That boy must be looked after. He may find that he has made a mistake in meddling with affairs that don't concern him."

CHAPTER XXXI

NEW PLANS

WHEN Grit returned he found his mother naturally curious to know where he had been and on what errand.

"I should like to tell you everything, mother," he said, "but it may not be prudent just yet."

"It's nothing wrong, I hope, Grit?"

"You may be sure of that, mother; I wouldn't engage in anything that I thought wrong. I feel justified in telling you confidentially that I was sent by Mr. Graves."

"What! the president of the bank?"

"Yes."

"Then it's all right," said Mrs. Brandon, with an air of relief.

"My time wasn't wasted, mother," said Grit, cheerfully, as he displayed a ten-dollar note, new and crisp, which Mr. Graves had given him, besides paying the expenses of his trip. "I've only been gone two days, and ten dollars will pay me very well. It's better than boating, at any rate."

"Yes; but it isn't a steady employment."

"No; don't suppose I have any idea of giving up boating because I have been paid five dollars a day for my trip. It's a help, though."

"Did you see anything of Mr. Brandon while you were gone?" asked his mother, apprehensively.

"No, mother. I can't say I was disappointed, either."

"When he went away he spoke mysteriously of some good fortune that was coming to him. He expected to earn a large sum of money, and talked of going to Europe."

"He is welcome to do so," said Grit, smiling. "I hope he will, and then we can resume our old life. I tell you, mother, I feel more sure than ever of getting along. I am certain I can earn considerably more next year than I have ever done before," and the boy's cheeks glowed and his eyes sparkled with cheerful hope.

"I am sure you deserve to, Grit, for you've always been a good son."

"I ought to be, for I've got a good mother," said the boy, with a glance of affection at his mother.

"He pays me for all," thought Mrs. Brandon, as she watched with pride and a mother's love the form of her boy as he walked down to the river.

"As long as he lives, I have reason to be grateful

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to God. Mr. Brandon is a heavy cross to me, but I can bear it while I have Grit."

Mr. Brandon, however, did not show himself. He was at Portland, subject to the orders of Colonel Johnson, who thought it not prudent that he or Travers should return just at present, lest, under the influence of liquor, they might become talkative and betray more than he desired.

It was at this point that he learned from Ephraim Carver that Grit had been sent to Boston in the place of the regular bank messenger.

"It looks as if somebody suspected something," he reflected anxiously. "Is it possible that any part of our plan has leaked out? And, if so, how? Then why should a boy like that be selected for so responsible a duty? He must have had some agency in the discovery. Ha! I have it. He is the stepson of this Brandon. I must question Brandon."

"Brandon," he said abruptly, summoning that worthy to his presence, "you have a son named Grit, have you not?"

"Yes—curse the brat!" answered Brandon, in a tone by no means paternal.

"What kind of a boy is he?"

"Impudent and undutiful," said Brandon. "He doesn't treat me with any kind of respect."

"I don't blame him for that," thought Johnson,

surveying his instrument with a glance that did not indicate the highest esteem.

"Did you tell him anything of our plans?" he asked searchingly.

"Tell him! He's the last person I'd tell!" returned Brandon, with emphasis.

"He didn't overhear you and Travers speaking of the matter, did he?"

"Certainly not. What makes you ask me that, colonel?"

"Because it was he who carried the genuine package of bonds to Boston—that's all."

"Grit—carried—the bonds!" Brandon ejaculated, in amazement.

"Yes."

"How did you find out?"

"Carver found out. I have just had a dispatch from him."

"Well, that beats me!" muttered Brandon. "I can't understand it at all."

"It looks as if Carver were distrusted. I shall find out presently. In the meanwhile I must see that boy of yours."

"I'll go and bring him here," said Brandon.

"Don't trouble yourself. I can manage the matter better by myself. I shall go to Boston this afternoon."

"Are Travers and I to go, too?"

"No; you can stay here. I'll direct you to a cheap boarding-house, where you can await my orders. I may take Travers with me."

This arrangement did not suit Brandon very well, though it might had he been entrusted with a liberal sum of money. But Colonel Johnson, having lost the valuable prize for which he had striven, was in no mood to be generous. He agreed to be responsible for Brandon's board, but only gave him two dollars for outside expenses, thus enforcing a degree of temperance which was very disagreeable to Brandon.

CHAPTER XXXII

GRIT RECEIVES A BUSINESS LETTER

GRIT returned to his old business, but I am obliged to confess that he was not as well contented with it as he had been a week previous. The incidents of the past four days had broadened his views and given him thoughts of a career which would suit him better. He earned a dollar and a quarter during the day, and this made a very good average. Multiply it by six, and it stood for an income of seven dollars and a half per week. This, to be sure, was not a large sum, but it was quite sufficient to maintain the little household in a degree of comfort which left nothing to be desired.

"It's all very well now," thought Grit, "but it won't lead to anything. I'm so old now"—he was not quite sixteen—"that I ought to be getting hold of some business that I can follow when I am a man. I don't mean to be a boatman when I am twenty-five years old."

There was something in this, no doubt. Still, Grit need not have felt in such a hurry. He was young enough to wait. Waiting, however, is a very bad thing for boys of his age. I only want to show how his mind was affected, in order that the reader may understand how it happened that he fell unsuspectingly into a trap which Colonel Johnson prepared for him.

After supper—it was two days later—Grit prepared to go to the village. He had a little errand of his own, and, besides, his mother wanted a few articles at the grocery store. Our hero, unlike some boys that I know, was always ready to do any errands for his mother, so that she was spared the trouble of exacting unwilling service.

Grit had done all his business, when he chanced to meet his friend Jesse Burns, who, as I have already said, was the son of the postmaster.

“How are you, Jesse?” said Grit.

“All right, Grit. Have you got your letter?”

“My letter!” returned Grit, in surprise.

“Yes; there’s a letter for you in the post-office.”

“I wonder who it can be from?”

“Perhaps it’s from your affectionate stepfather,” suggested Jesse, smiling.

“I hope not. I don’t want to see or hear from him.”

"Well, you can easily solve the problem. You have only to take the letter out."

"That's good advice, Jesse. I'll follow it."

Grit called for his letter, and noticed, with some surprise, that it was addressed to him not under his real name, but under that familiar name by which we know him.

"Grit Morris," said Jesse, scanning the envelope. "Who can it be from?"

The letter was postmarked Boston, and was addressed in a bold, business hand.

Grit opened the envelope, read it through hastily and with a look of evident pleasure.

"What's it all about, Grit?" asked Jesse.

"Read it for yourself, Jesse," said the young boatman, handing the letter to his friend.

This was the letter:

"DEAR SIR: I need a young person on whom I can rely to travel for me at the West. I don't know you personally, but you have been recommended to me as likely to suit my purpose. I am willing to pay twelve dollars per week and traveling expenses. If this will suit your views, come to Boston at once and call upon me at my private residence, No. ——— Essex Street.

"Yours truly,

"SOLOMON WEAVER."

"What are you going to do about it, Grit?" asked Jesse, when he had finished reading the letter.

"I shall go to Boston to-morrow morning," answered Grit, promptly.

CHAPTER XXXIII

GRIT LEAVES PINE POINT

"It does seem to be a good offer," said Jesse, thoughtfully.

"I should think it was—twelve dollars a week and traveling expenses," said Grit, enthusiastically.

"I wonder how this Mr. Weaver came to hear of you?"

"I can't think. That's what puzzles me," said Grit.

"He says that you have been recommended to him, I see."

"Yes. At any rate, I am very much obliged to the one who recommended me."

"What will your mother say?"

"She won't want to part with me; but when I tell her how good the offer is she will get reconciled to it."

When Grit went home and read the letter to his mother it was a shock to the good woman.

"How can I part from you, Grit?" she said, with a troubled look.

"It won't be for long, mother," said Grit, hopefully. "I shall soon be able to send for you, and we can settle down somewhere near Boston. I've got tired of this place, haven't you?"

"No, Grit. I think Pine Point is very pleasant, as long as I can keep you with me. When you are gone, of course, it will seem very different. I don't see how I am going to stand it."

"It won't be for long, mother; and you'll know I am doing well."

"You can make a living with your boat. Grit."

"Yes, mother; but it isn't going to lead to anything. It's all very well now, but half a dozen years from now I ought to be established in some good business."

"Can't you put off going for a year, Grit?"

"A year hence there may be no such chance as this, mother."

"That is true."

"You'll give your consent, then, mother?"

"If you really think it best, Grit—that is, if you've set your heart on it."

"I have, mother," said Grit, earnestly. "I was getting tired of boating before this letter came, but I kept at it because there didn't seem to be anything else. Now it would seem worse than ever, and I'm afraid I should be very discontented."

"I wish you would call on your friend Mr. Jack-

son at the hotel and see what he thinks of it," said Mrs. Brandon. "He is an experienced man of business, and his judgment will be better than ours."

"I will do as you say, mother. I am sure he will recommend me to go."

Grit went to the hotel, arriving there about eight o'clock, and inquired for Mr. Jackson. He was told that that gentleman had started in the morning for Augusta, and would not return for a day or two. The young boatman was not, on the whole, sorry to hear this, for it was possible that the broker might not think favorably of the plan proposed, and he felt unwilling, even in that case, to give it up. He returned and acquainted his mother with the result of his visit.

"Can't you wait till Mr. Jackson returns?" asked his mother.

"No, mother; I should run the risk of losing the chance."

The evening was spent in getting ready to go. Grit left in his mother's hands all the money he had, except the ten dollars he had last received, and gave an order for the sixty dollars in the hands of Mr. Lawrence, the lawyer; so that, even if this western journey were prolonged for three months, his mother would have enough to provide for her wants.

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"Now, mother, I can leave home without any anxiety," he said.

"You will write me often, Grit?" said Mrs. Brandon, anxiously.

"Oh, yes, mother; there is no danger I shall forget that."

"Your letters will be all I shall have to think of, you know, Grit."

"I won't forget it, mother."

Grit kissed his mother good-by, and bent his steps toward the railway station.

On the way he met Ephraim Carver.

"Where are you going, Grit?" asked the bank messenger.

"I am going to Boston."

"It seems to me you have a good deal of business in Boston."

"I hope to have."

"You ain't going to stay, are you?"

"I expect to stay. I've got an offer from a party there."

"Of what sort?"

"That letter will tell you."

Ephraim Carver looked over the letter, and he smiled to himself, for he recognized the handwriting of Colonel Johnson, though the letter was signed by another name.

"You're walking into the lion's den, young

man," he thought; but he only said: "It seems to be a good offer. Why, you will be paid as much as I get. How old are you?"

"Almost sixteen."

"Boys get on more rapidly now than they did when I was of your age. Why, I'm more'n twenty years older than you are, and I haven't got any higher than twelve dollars a week yet."

Mr. Carver laughed in what seemed to be an entirely uncalled-for manner.

"I don't believe you'll keep your last place long," thought the young boatman; but he, too, was not disposed to tell all he knew. So the two parted, each possessed of a secret in regard to the other.

Mr. Carver, however, was destined to receive the first disagreeable surprise. After parting from Grit he met Mr. Graves in the street.

"Good morning, Mr. Graves," he said, in his usual deferential manner, for he was a worldly wise man, though he had committed one fatal mistake.

"Good morning, Mr. Carver," said the president of the bank, gravely.

"Shall you have any errand for me this week?"

"I have something to say to you, Mr. Carver," said Mr. Graves, "and I may as well take the present opportunity to do so. We have concluded to

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dispense with your services, and you are at liberty to look elsewhere for employment."

"You are going to dispense with my services!" repeated Carver, in dismay.

"Such is the determination of the directors, Mr. Carver."

"But, sir, this is very hard on me. How am I to get along?"

"I hope you may find something else to do. We shall pay you a month's salary in advance, to give you an opportunity of looking about."

"But, Mr. Graves, why am I treated so harshly? Can't you intercede for me? I am a poor man."

"I feel for your situation, Mr. Carver, but I am compelled to say that I do not feel disposed to intercede for you."

"Haven't I always served the bank faithfully?"

"I advise you to ask yourself that question, Mr. Carver," said the president, significantly. "You can answer it to your own conscience better than I or any one else can do for you."

"What does he mean?" thought Carver, startled.

Then it occurred to the messenger that nothing had been discovered, but that Mr. Graves, who had recently shown such partiality to Grit, wished to create a vacancy for him.

"Are you going to put Grit Morris in my place?" he asked angrily.

"What makes you think so?" asked Mr. Graves, keenly.

"I knew you were partial to him," answered Carver, who reflected that it would not do to give the source of his information.

"I will, at any rate, answer your question, Mr. Carver. There is no intention of putting Grit in your place. We have every confidence in his fidelity and capacity, but consider him too young for the position."

"I was only going to say that Grit has another chance in Boston, so that there will be no need to provide for him."

"Grit has a chance in Boston!" said Mr. Graves, in surprise.

"Yes; he has just started for the city."

"What sort of a chance is it?"

"He has received an offer to travel at the West, with a salary of twelve dollars a week and expenses."

"That is strange."

"It is true. He showed me the letter."

"From whom did it come?"

"I don't remember."

Carver did remember, but for obvious reasons did not think it best to acquaint Mr. Graves.

"That is remarkable," thought Mr. Graves, as he walked home. "Grit is a smart boy, but such offers are not often made by strangers to a boy of fifteen. I must speak to Clark about it."

He found Mr. Clark at his house. He was the quiet man who had been employed by the bank as a detective, and who had come to report to the president.

There was a look of intelligence as he listened to the news about Grit.

"I tell you what I think of it," he said. "The rascals have found out the part which Grit took in circumventing them, and this letter is part of a plot. They mean the boy mischief."

"I hope not," said Mr. Graves, anxiously. "I am attached to Grit, and I wouldn't have harm come to him for a good deal."

"Leave the matter in my hands. I will take the next train for Boston and follow this clue. It may enable me to get hold of this Johnson, who is a dangerous rascal, because he has brains."

"Do so, and I will see you paid, if necessary, out of my own pocket."

CHAPTER XXXIV

GRIT REACHES BOSTON

FULL of hope and joyful anticipation, Grit left home and pursued his journey to Boston. He had occasion to stop a couple of hours at Portland, and improved it by strolling down to the pier of the little steamers that make periodical trips to the islands in the harbor. Just outside a low saloon he unexpectedly ran across his stepfather.

"How are you, Grit?" said Brandon, affably.

There was a flush on Brandon's face and an unsteadiness of gait which indicated that he had succeeded in evading what is known as the Maine law. To Grit it was not a welcome apparition. Still, he felt it due to himself to be ordinarily polite.

"I am well," he answered briefly.

"And how's your mother?" asked Brandon.

"Quite well, thank you," Grit answered, as formally as if the question had been asked by a stranger.

"Does she miss me much?" asked his stepfather, with a smile.

"She has not mentioned it," responded our hero, coldly.

"I am sorry that circumstances compel me to be absent from her for a time," continued Brandon.

"Oh, don't disturb yourself," said Grit. "She is quite used to being alone. I think she mentioned that you talked of going to Europe."

Brandon frowned, and his bitter disappointment was thus recalled to his mind.

"I don't know whether I shall or not," he answered. "It depends upon whether my—speculation turns out well. Where are you going?"

Grit hesitated as to whether he should answer correctly. He was not anxious to have Brandon looking him up in Boston, but it occurred to him that he should be traveling at the West, and therefore he answered:

"I have heard of a chance in Boston, and am going to see about it."

"All right, Grit!" said Brandon. "You have my consent."

It occurred to Grit that he did not stand in need of his stepfather's approval, but he did not say so.

"Yes, Grit, I send you forth with a father's blessing," said Brandon, paternally. "By the way, have you a quarter about you?"

Grit thought that a quarter was rather a high price to pay for Brandon's blessing, but he was in

good spirits, and this made him good-natured. Accordingly, he drew a quarter from his pocket and handed it to his stepfather.

"Thank you, Grit," said Brandon, briskly, for he had felt uncertain as to the success of his application. "I like to see you respectful and dutiful. I will drink your good health and success to your plans."

"You had better drink it in cold water, Mr. Brandon."

"That's all right," said Brandon. "Good-by!"

He disappeared in the direction of the nearest saloon, and Grit returned to the depot to take the train for Boston.

"I don't know that I ought to have given him any money," thought Grit, "but I was so glad to get rid of him that I couldn't refuse."

He reached Boston without further adventure, arriving at the Boston and Maine depot in Haymarket Square about four o'clock.

"I wonder whether it is too late to call on Mr. Weaver to-night," thought Grit.

He decided that it was not. Even if it were too late for an interview, he thought it would be wise to let his prospective employer understand that he had met his appointment punctually.

"Carriage, sir?" asked a hackman.

Grit answered in the negative, feeling that to

one in his circumstances it would be foolish extravagance to spend money for a carriage. But this was succeeded by the thought that time was valuable, and, as he did not know where Essex Street was, it might consume so much time to find out the place indicated in the letter that he might miss the opportunity of seeing Mr. Weaver.

"How far is Essex Street from here?" he asked.

"Three or four miles," promptly answered the hackman.

"Is there any street-car line that goes there?"

"Oh, bless you, no."

Neither of these answers was correct, but Grit did not know this.

"How much will you charge me to take me to No. — Essex Street?"

"Seein' it's you, I'll take you for a dollar and a quarter."

Grit was about to accept this offer, when a quiet-looking man beside him said:

"The regular fare is fifty cents."

"Is it any of your business?" demanded the hackman, angrily. "Do you want to take the bread out of a poor man's mouth?"

"Yes, if the poor man undertakes to cheat a boy!" answered the quiet man, keenly.

"It's ridiculous expectin' to pay fifty cents for a

ride of three or four miles," grumbled the hackman.

"The distance isn't over a mile and a quarter, and you are not allowed to ask over fifty cents. My boy, I advise you to call another hack."

"Jump in," said the hackman, fearful of losing his fare.

"I think I will get in, too, as I am going to that part of the city," said the small man, in whom my readers will probably recognize the detective already referred to.

"That'll be extra."

"Of course," said the detective. "I understand that, and I understand how much extra," said the stranger, significantly.

As the man and boy rattled through the streets, they fell into a conversation, and Grit, feeling that he was with a friend, told his plan.

"Humph!" said the detective. "May I see this letter?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Do you know who recommended you to Mr. Weaver?" asked Grit's new friend.

"No, sir."

"And can't guess?"

"No, sir."

"Doesn't it strike you as a little singular that such an offer should come from a stranger?"

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"Yes, sir, that did occur to me. Don't you think it genuine?" asked Grit, anxiously.

"I don't know. I could tell better if I should see this Mr. Weaver."

"Won't you go in with me?"

"No; it might seem odd, and the proposal may be genuine. I'll tell you what to do, my boy—that is, if you feel confidence in me."

"I do, and shall be glad of your advice."

"Come to the Parker House after your interview and inquire for Benjamin Baker."

"I will, sir, and thank you."

When the hack drew up in front of No. — Essex Street the stranger got out with Grit.

"I am calling close by," he said, "and won't ride any farther. Here is the fare for both."

"But, sir," said Grit, "it is not right that you should pay my fare for me."

"It is all right," said Mr. Baker. "I have more money than you, probably, my young friend. Besides, meeting with you has saved me some trouble."

This speech puzzled Grit, but he did not feel like asking an explanation.

He glanced with some interest at the house where he was to meet Mr. Weaver. It was a three-story brick house, with a swell front, such as used to be very popular in Boston thirty or forty

years since. It was very quiet in appearance, and there was nothing to distinguish it from its neighbors on either side.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Baker," said Grit, as he ascended the steps to ring the bell.

"Good afternoon. Remember to call upon me at the Parker House."

"Thank you, sir."

Benjamin Baker turned down a side street, and Grit rang the bell.

The door was opened by a tall, gaunt woman, with a cast in her eye.

"What's wanted?" she asked abruptly.

"I called to see Mr. Weaver—Mr. Solomon Weaver," said Grit.

"Oh, yes," said the woman, with a curious smile. "Come in."

The hall which Grit entered was dark and shabby in its general appearance. Our hero followed his guide to a rear room, the door of which was thrown open, revealing a small apartment, with a shabby collection of furniture. There was no carpet on the floor, but one or two rugs relieved the large expanse of floor.

"Take a seat, and I'll call Mr. Weaver," said the woman.

Somehow Grit's courage was dampened by the unpromising look of the house and its interior.

He had pictured to himself Mr. Weaver as a pleasant, prosperous-looking man, who lived in good style and was liberally disposed.

He sat down in an armchair in the center of the room.

He had but five minutes to wait.

Then the door opened, and to Grit's amazement the man whom he had known as Colonel Johnson entered the room and coolly locked the door after him.

CHAPTER XXXV

CROSS-EXAMINED

GRIT's face showed the astonishment he felt at the unexpected appearance of a man whom he knew to be the prime instigator of the attempt to rob the bank at Chester.

Colonel Johnson smiled grimly as he saw the effect produced by his presence.

"You didn't expect to see me?" he said.

"No, sir," answered Grit.

"I flattered myself you had done me the honor to call upon me," said Johnson, seating himself at a little distance from our hero.

"I came to see Mr. Solomon Weaver, from whom I received a letter," explained Grit. "If this is your house I may have made a mistake in the number."

"Not at all," answered Johnson. "Mr. Weaver is a friend of mine."

"Does he live here?"

"Oh, yes," said Johnson, smiling.

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"He wrote me that he wished to send me on a Western trip."

"That's all right."

"Then the letter was genuine," said Grit, hoping that things might turn out right, after all.

Could it be possible, he thought, that Colonel Johnson was the friend who had recommended him? It did not seem at all probable, but in his bewilderment he did not know what to think.

"Can I see Mr. Weaver?" asked Grit, desirous of putting an end to his uncertainty.

"Presently," answered Colonel Johnson. "He is busy just at present, but he deputed me to speak with you."

This was all very surprising, but would probably soon be explained.

"I shall be glad to answer any questions," said Grit.

"I suppose you can present good recommendations, as the position is a responsible one?" said Johnson, with a half-smile.

"Yes, sir."

"Whom, for instance?"

"Mr. Graves, president of the Chester Bank," said Grit.

Knowing what he did of Colonel Johnson's attempt upon the bank, it was perhaps a rather odd choice to make, but the young boatman thought it

might help him to discover whether Johnson knew anything of his recent employment by the bank.

"I have heard of Mr. Graves," said Johnson. "Has he ever employed you?"

"Yes, sir."

"In what capacity?" demanded Johnson, searchingly.

"He sent me to this city with a package."

"What did the package contain?"

"I think it contained bonds."

"Haven't they a regular bank messenger?"

"Yes, sir."

"What's his name?"

"Ephraim Carver."

"Why was he not employed? Why should you be sent in his place?"

"I think you had better ask Mr. Graves," said Grit, independently.

"Why? Don't you know?"

"Even if I did, I should consider that I had no right to tell."

"You are a very conscientious and honorable young man," said Johnson, sneeringly.

"Thank you, sir," returned Grit, choosing not to show that he understood the sneer.

"Where is your stepfather?" inquired Johnson, changing the subject abruptly.

"In Portland."

"How do you know?"

"I met him in the street while on my way through the city.

"Did you speak with him?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did he say?" asked Johnson, suspiciously.

"He wished to borrow twenty-five cents," answered Grit, with a smile.

"Did you lend it to him?"

"Yes."

"Very dutiful, on my word!"

"I have no feeling of that sort for Mr. Brandon," said Grit, frankly. "I thought it the easiest way to get rid of him."

Johnson changed the subject again.

"Is Ephraim Carver likely to lose his situation as bank messenger?" he asked.

"I think you had better ask Mr. Graves," said Grit, on his guard.

Johnson frowned, for he did not like Grit's independence.

"It is reported that you are intriguing for his position," he continued.

"That is not true."

"Do you think there is any likelihood of your being appointed in his place?"

"No, sir; I never dreamed of it."

"Yet there is a possibility of it. Don't suppose

that I am particularly interested in this Carver. So far as I am concerned, I should not object to your succeeding him."

"What does this all mean?" thought Grit.

"If you should do so, I might have a proposal to make to you that would be to your advantage."

Knowing what he did, Grit very well understood what was meant. Johnson, no doubt, wished to hire him to betray the confidence reposed in him by the bank and deliver up any valuable package entrusted to him for a money consideration. Like any right-minded and honorable boy, Grit felt that the very hint of such a thing was an insult to him, and his face flushed with indignation. For the moment he forgot his prudence.

"I don't think there is the least chance of my getting such a position," he said; "but even if I did, it would not do you any good to make me a proposal."

"How do you know what sort of a proposal I should make?" demanded Johnson, keenly.

"I don't know," answered Grit, emphasizing the last word.

"It appears to me, young man, that you are a little ahead of time," said Johnson. "You shouldn't crow too soon."

"I think I will bid you good evening," said Grit, rising.

"Why so soon? You haven't seen Mr. Weaver."

"On the whole, I don't think I should wish to engage with him."

Our hero felt that if Mr. Weaver were a friend of the man before him it would be safest to have nothing to do with him. On the principle that a man is known by the company he keeps, the friend of Colonel Johnson could hardly be a desirable person to serve.

"You seem to be in a hurry, especially as you have not seen my friend Weaver."

"You will be kind enough to explain to him that I have changed my plans," said Grit.

"Resume your seat for five minutes," said Johnson, "and I will call Weaver. You had better see him for yourself."

He reflected that merely seeing Mr. Weaver would not commit him to anything.

Colonel Johnson rose to his feet and placed his foot firmly on a particular spot in the floor.

To Grit's dismay, the floor seemed to sink beneath him, and chair and all were lowered a dozen feet into a subterranean cavity, too quickly for him to help himself.

He realized that the chair so conveniently placed in the center of the apartment rested on a trap-door.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE BOY DANIEL

THOUGH Grit was not hurt by his sudden descent into the dark cavity under the room in which he had been seated, he was, nevertheless, somewhat startled. Indeed, it was enough to startle a person much older. For the first time it dawned upon him that he was the victim of a conspiracy, and Mr. Weaver was either an imaginary person or his offer was not genuine. It was clear, also, from the tenor of Johnson's questions, that he fully understood, or at least suspected, that his plan had been known in advance to the bank officials.

The young boatman understood how to manage a boat, but in the present case he found that he was out of his element. The tricks, traps and devices of a great city he knew very little about. He had, indeed, read about trap-doors and subterranean chambers in certain sensational stories which had come into his possession, but he looked upon them as mere figments of the imagination, and did

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not believe they really existed. Now, here was he himself made an unexpected victim by a conspiracy of the same class familiar to him in novels.

Naturally, the first thing to do was to take a survey of his new quarters and obtain some idea of his position. At first everything seemed involved in thick darkness, but as his eye became accustomed to it he could see that he was in a cellar of about the same size as the room above, though there was a door leading into another. He felt his way to it and tried to open it, but found that it was fastened, probably by a bolt on the other side. There was no other door.

"I am like a rat in a trap," thought Grit. "What are they going to do with me, I wonder?"

"While it was unpleasant enough to be where he was, he did not allow himself to despond or give way to unmanly fears. There was no reason, he thought, to apprehend serious peril or physical violence. Colonel Johnson probably intended to frighten him, with a view of securing his compliance with the demands of the conspirators.

"He will find he has made a mistake," thought Grit. "I am not a baby, and don't mean to act like one."

He heard a noise, and, looking round, discovered the armchair in which he had descended being drawn up toward the trap-door. The door was

opened by some agency, the chair disappeared, and again he was in darkness.

"They don't mean to keep me here in luxury," thought Grit. "If I sit down anywhere, it will have to be on the floor."

It was late in the afternoon, as we know, and it seemed likely that our hero would have to remain in the subterranean chamber all night. As there was no bed, he would have to lie down on the ground. Grit kneeled down, and ascertained that the floor was cemented, and not a damp earthen flooring, as he had feared. He congratulated himself, for he was bound to make the best of the situation.

There was another source of discomfort, however. It was already past Grit's ordinary supper hour, and, except a very slight lunch, consisting of a sandwich bought in the cars, our hero had had nothing to eat since breakfast, and an early breakfast, at that. Now, Grit was not one of those delicate boys who are satisfied with a few mouthfuls, but he had what is called a "healthy appetite," such as belongs to most boys who have good stomachs and spend considerable time in the open air. He began to feel an aching void in the region of his stomach, and thought, with a sigh, of the plain but hearty supper he should have had at home.

"I hope Colonel Johnson isn't going to starve

me," he thought. "That is carrying the joke too far. It seems to me I never felt so hungry in all my life before."

Half an hour passed, and poor Grit's reflections became decidedly gloomy as his stomach became more and more troublesome. However, he was perfectly helpless, and must wait till the man, or men, who had him in their clutches saw fit to provide for him.

Under these circumstances it may well be imagined that his heart leaped for joy when he heard the bolt of the only door, already referred to, slowly withdrawn with a rasping sound, as if it did not slide easily in its socket.

He turned his eyes eagerly toward the door.

It was opened, and a tall, overgrown youth entered with a small basket in his hand, which he set down on the floor while he carefully closed the door.

"Hello, there! Where are you?" he asked, for his eyes were not used to the darkness.

"Here I am," answered Grit. "I hope you've brought me some supper."

"Right you are!" said the youth. "Oh, now I see you."

The speaker was tall and overgrown, as I have said. He was painfully thin, and his clothes were two or three sizes too small for him, so that his

long, bony arms protruded from his coat-sleeves and his legs appeared to have outgrown his pants. His face was long and his cheeks were hollow.

"He reminds me of Smike, in 'Nicholas Nickleby,' " thought Grit.

"Take your supper, young one, and eat it quick," said the youth, for he was not more than eighteen.

Grit needed no second invitation. He quickly explored the contents of the basket. The supper consisted of cold meat and slices of bread and butter, with a mug of tea. To Grit everything tasted delicious, and he didn't leave a crumb.

"My, haven't you got an appetite!" said the youth.

"I haven't had anything to eat since morning," said Grit, apologetically—that is, only a sandwich."

"Say, what are you in here for?" asked the youth, curiously.

"I don't know," answered Grit.

"Honor bright?"

"Yes, honor bright. Do you live here?"

"Yes," answered the youth, soberly.

"Is this man—Colonel Johnson—any relation of yours?"

"No."

"Where are your folks?"

"Haven't got any. Never had any, as I know of."

"Have you always lived here?"

"Always lived with him," answered the boy, jerking his thumb in an upward direction. "Sometimes here, sometimes in New York."

"Do you like to be with—him?"

"No."

"Why don't you run away?"

"Run away!" repeated the other, looking around him nervously. "He'd get me back and half kill me."

"There's some mystery about this boy," thought Grit. "Do you think he will keep me here long?" he asked, in some anxiety.

"Can't say—maybe."

"What's your name?"

"Daniel."

"What's your other name?"

"Haven't got any."

"Daniel," said Grit, a thought striking him, "do you ever go out—about the city, I mean?"

"Oh, yes; I go to the post-office and other places."

"Will you carry a message for me to the Parker House?"

"I darsn't," said Daniel, trembling.

"No one will know it," pleaded Grit. "Besides,

"I'll give you—five dollars," he added, after a pause.

"Have you got so much?" asked Daniel, eagerly.

"Yes."

"Show it to me."

Grit did so.

"Yes, I'll do it," said the youth, after a pause; "but I must be careful, so he won't know."

"All right. When can you leave the house?"

"In the morning."

"That will suit me very well. Now, shall I see you again to-morrow morning?"

"Yes, I shall bring you your breakfast."

"Very well; I will write a note, and will describe the gentleman you are to hand it to."

"You'll be sure to give me the money?"

"Yes; I will give it to you before you go, if you will promise to do my errand faithfully."

"I'll promise. I never had five dollars," continued Daniel. "There's many things I can buy for five dollars."

"So you can," answered Grit, who began to perceive that this overgrown youth was rather deficient mentally.

"You mustn't tell anybody that you are going to carry a message for me," said Grit, thinking the caution might be necessary.

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"Oh, no, I darsn't," said Daniel, quickly, and Grit was satisfied.

Our hero felt much more comfortable after he was left alone, partly in consequence of the plain supper he had eaten, partly because he thought he saw his way out of the trap into which he had been inveigled.

"To-morrow I hope to be free," he said to himself, as he lay down on the floor and sought the refreshment of sleep.

Fortunately for him, he was feeling pretty well fatigued, and, though it was but eight o'clock, he soon lost consciousness of all that was disagreeable in his situation under the benignant influence of sleep.

When Grit awoke he had no idea of what time it was, there was no way for light to enter the dark chamber.

"I hope it is almost breakfast time," thought our hero, for he already felt the stirrings of appetite, and, besides, all his hope centered in Daniel, whom he was then to see.

After a while he heard the welcome sound of the bolt drawn back. Then a sudden fear assailed him. It might be some one else, not Daniel, who would bring his breakfast. If so, all his hopes would be dashed to the ground, and he could fix no limit to his captivity. But his fears were dissipated when

he saw the long, lank youth, with the same basket which he had brought the night before.

"Good morning, Daniel," said Grit, joyfully. "I am glad to see you."

"You're hungry, I reckon," said the youth, practically.

"Yes; but I wanted to see you, so as to give you my message. Are you going out this morning?"

"Yes; I'm goin' to market."

"Can you go to the Parker House? You know where it is, don't you?"

"Yes; it is on School Street."

Grit was glad that Daniel knew, for he could not have told him.

Grit had written a note in pencil on a sheet of paper which he fortunately had in his pocket. This he handed to Daniel, with full instructions as to the outward appearance of Mr. Benjamin Baker, to whom it was to be handed.

"Now give me the money," said Daniel.

"Here it is. Mind, Daniel, I expect you to serve me faithfully."

"All right!" said the lank youth, as he disappeared through the door, once more leaving Grit alone.

CHAPTER XXXVII

DANIEL CALLS AT THE PARKER HOUSE

IT was half-past nine o'clock in the forenoon, and Mr. Benjamin Baker, detective, sat smoking a cigar in the famous hotel on School Street known as "Parker's."

"I hope nothing has happened to the boy," he said to himself, uneasily, as he drew out his watch. "It is time he was here. Have I done rightly in leaving him in the clutches of a company of unprincipled men? Yet I don't know what else I could do. If I had accompanied him to the door my appearance would have awakened suspicion. If through his means I can get authentic information as to the interior of this house, which I strongly suspect to be the headquarters of the gang, I shall have done a good thing. Yet perhaps I did wrong in not giving the boy a word of warning."

Mr. Baker took the cigar from his mouth and strolled into the opposite room, where several of the hotel guests were either reading the morning

papers or writing letters. He glanced quickly about him, but saw no one that resembled Grit.

"Not here yet?" he said to himself. "Perhaps he can't find the hotel. But he looks too smart to have any difficulty about that. Ha! whom have we here?"

This question was elicited by a singular figure upon the sidewalk. It was a tall, overgrown boy, whose well-worn suit appeared to have been first put on when he was several years younger and several inches shorter. The boy was standing still, with mouth and eyes wide open, staring in a bewildered way at the entrance of the hotel, as if he had some business therein, but did not know how to go about it.

"That's an odd-looking boy," he thought. "Looks like one of Dickens' characters."

Finally the boy, in an uncertain, puzzled way, ascended the steps into the main vestibule, and again began to stare helplessly in different directions.

One of the employees of the hotel went up to him.

"What do you want?" he demanded, rather roughly.

"Be you Mr. Baker?" asked the boy.

"No, I am not Mr. Baker."

"Where is Mr. Baker?"

"I don't know anything about Mr. Baker," answered the attendant, impatiently.

"The boy told me I would find him here," said Daniel, for of course my reader recognizes him.

"Then the boy was playing a trick on you, most likely."

By this time Mr. Baker thought it advisable to make himself known.

"I am Mr. Benjamin Baker," he said, advancing. "Do you want to see me?"

Daniel looked very much relieved.

"I've got a note for you," he said.

"Give it to me."

Daniel did so, and was about to go out.

"Wait a minute, my young friend; there may be an answer," said the detective.

Mr. Baker read the following note:

"I am in trouble. I think the letter I received was only meant to entrap me. I have not seen Mr. Weaver, but I have had an interview with Colonel Johnson, who planned the robbery of the bank at Chester. He seems to know that I had something to do with defeating his plans, and has sounded me as to whether I will help him in case I act again as bank messenger. On my refusing, he touched a spring and let me down through a trap-door in the floor of the rear room to a cellar beneath, where

I am kept in darkness. The boy who gives you this note brings me my meals. He doesn't seem very bright, but I have agreed to pay him well if he hands you this, and I hope he will succeed. I don't know what Colonel Johnson proposes to do with me, but I hope you will be able to help me.

"GRIT."

Benjamin Baker nodded to himself while he was reading this note.

"This confirms my suspicions," he said to himself. "If I am lucky I shall succeed in trapping the trappers. Hark you, my boy, when are you going back?"

"As soon as I have been to market."

"Very well. What did the boy agree to give you for bringing this note?"

"Five dollars," answered Daniel, his dull face lighting up, for he knew the power of money.

"Would you like five dollars more?"

"Wouldn't I!" was the eager response.

"Then don't say a word to anybody about bringing this note."

"No, I won't. He'd strap me if I did."

"Shall you see the boy?"

"Yes, at twelve o'clock, when I carry his dinner."

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"When you see him, tell him you've seen me, and it's all right. Do you understand?"

Daniel nodded.

"I may call up there some time this morning. If I do, I want you to open the door and let me in."

Daniel nodded again.

"That will do. You can go."

Mr. Baker left the hotel with a preoccupied air.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

GRIT MAKES A DISCOVERY

GRIT, left to himself, was subjected to the hardest trial—that of waiting for deliverance, and not knowing whether the expected help would come.

“At any rate, I have done the best I could,” he said to himself. “Daniel is the best messenger I could obtain. He doesn’t seem to be more than half-witted, but he ought to be intelligent enough to find Mr. Baker and deliver my note.”

The subterranean apartment, with its utter destitution of furniture, furnished absolutely no resources against ennui. Grit was fond of reading, and, in spite of his anxiety, might in an interesting paper or book have forgotten his captivity; but there was nothing to read, and even if there had been, it was too dark to avail himself of it.

“I suppose I sha’n’t see Daniel till noon,” he reflected. “Till then I am left in suspense.”

He sat down in a corner and began to think over his position and future prospects. He was not

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wholly cast down, for he refused to believe that he was in any real peril. In fact, though a captive, he had never felt more hopeful or more self-reliant than now. But he was an active boy, and accustomed to exercise, and he grew tired of sitting down.

"I will walk a little," he decided, and proceeded to pace up and down his limited apartment.

Then it occurred to him to ascertain the dimensions of the room by pacing.

As he did so he ran his hand along the side wall. A most remarkable thing occurred. A door flew open, which had appeared like the rest of the wall, and a narrow passageway was revealed, leading Grit could not tell where.

"I must have touched some spring," he thought. "This house is a regular trap. I wonder where this passageway leads?"

Grit stooped down, for the passage was but about four feet in height, and tried to peer through the darkness. But he could see nothing.

"Shall I explore it?" he thought.

He hesitated a moment, not knowing whether it would be prudent, but finally curiosity overruled prudence and he decided to do so.

Stooping over, he felt his way for possibly fifty feet, when he came to a solid wall. Here seemed to be the end of the passage.

He began to feel slowly with his hand, when another small door, only about twelve inches square, flew open, and he looked through it into another subterranean apartment. It did not appear to be occupied, but on a small wooden table was a candle, and by the light of the candle Grit could see a variety of articles, including several trunks, one open, revealing its contents to be plate.

"What does it mean?" thought Grit.

Then the thought came to him, for, though he was a country boy, his wits had been sharpened by his recent experiences. "It must be a storehouse of stolen goods."

This supposition seemed in harmony with the character of the man who had lured him here and now held him captive.

"If I were only outside," thought Grit, "I would tell Mr. Baker of this. The police ought to know it."

Just then he heard his name called, and, turning suddenly, distinguished by the faint light which the candle threw into the passage the stern and menacing countenance of Colonel Johnson.

"Come out here, boy!" he called, in an angry tone. "I have an account to settle with you."

CHAPTER XXXIX

AN UNPLEASANT INTERVIEW

THERE was nothing to do but to obey. Judging by his own interpretation of the discovery, our hero was not surprised that his captor should be incensed. He retraced his steps, and found himself once more in the subterranean chamber, facing an angry man.

"What took you in there?" demanded Colonel Johnson.

"Curiosity, I suppose," answered Grit, composedly. He felt that he was in a scrape, but he was not a boy to show fear or confusion.

"How did you happen to discover the entrance?"

"It was quite accidental. I was pacing the floor, to see how wide the room was, when my hand touched the spring."

"Why did you want to know the width of the room?" asked Johnson, suspiciously.

"I didn't care much to know, but the time hung heavily on my hands, and that was one way of filling it up."

Colonel Johnson eyed the boy attentively. He was at a loss to know whether Grit really suspected the nature and meaning of his discovery or not. If not, he didn't wish to excite suspicion in the boy's mind. He decided to insinuate an explanation.

"I suppose you were surprised to find the passageway?" he remarked.

"Yes, sir."

"As you have always lived in the country, that is natural. Such arrangements are common enough in the city."

"I wonder whether trap-doors are common?" thought Grit, but he did not give expression to his thought.

"The room into which you looked is under the house of my brother-in-law, and the passage affords an easy mode of entrance."

"I should think it would be easier going into the street," thought Grit.

"Still, I am annoyed at your meddlesome curiosity, and shall take measures to prevent your gratifying it again. I had a great mind when I first saw you to shut you up in the passage. I fancy you wouldn't enjoy that."

"I certainly shouldn't," said Grit, smiling.

"I will have some consideration for you, and put a stop to your wanderings in another way."

As he spoke he drew from his pocket a thick,

stout cord, and, directing Grit to hold his hands together, proceeded to tie his wrists. This our hero naturally regarded as distasteful.

"You need not do this," he said. "I will promise not to go into the passage."

"Humph! Will you promise not to attempt to escape?"

"No, sir, I can't promise that."

"Ha! you mean, then, to attempt to escape?"

"Of course!" answered Grit. "I should be a fool to stay here if any chance offered of getting away."

"You are candid, young man," returned Johnson. "There is no earthly chance of your escaping. Still, I may as well make sure. Put out your feet."

"You are not going to tie my feet, too, are you?" asked Grit, in some dismay.

"To be sure I am. I can't trust you after what you have done this morning."

It was of no use to resist, for Colonel Johnson was a powerful man, and Grit, though strong, only a boy of sixteen.

"This doesn't look much like escaping," thought Grit. "I hope he won't search my pockets and discover my knife. If I can get hold of that I may be able to release myself."

Colonel Johnson had just completed tying the last knot when the door, which had been left un-

bolted, was seen to open, and the half-witted boy, Daniel, entered hastily.

"How now, idiot!" said Johnson, harshly. "What brings you here?"

"There's a gentleman upstairs wants to see you, master," said Daniel, with the scared look with which he always regarded his tyrant.

"A gentleman!" repeated Johnson, hastily. "Who let him in?"

"I did, sir."

"You did!" thundered Johnson. "How often have I told you to let in nobody? Do you want me to choke you?"

"I—forgot," faltered the boy. "Besides, he said he wanted to see you particular."

"All the more reason why I don't want to see him. What does he look like?"

"He's a small man, sir."

"Humph! Where did you leave him?"

"Room above, sir."

"I'll go up and see him. If it's somebody I don't want to see, I'll choke you."

"Yes, sir," said Daniel, humbly.

As Johnson went out, Daniel lingered a moment, and in a hoarse whisper said to Grit:

"It's him."

"Who is it?" asked Grit, puzzled.

"It's the man you sent me to."

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"Good! You're a trump, Daniel," said Grit, joyfully.

A minute after a confused noise was heard in the room above. Daniel turned pale.

"Tell him where I am, Daniel," said Grit, as the boy timidly left the room.

CHAPTER XL

COLONEL JOHNSON COMES TO GRIEF

WE must now follow Johnson upstairs.

In the room above, sitting down tranquilly in an armchair, but not in the center of the room, was a small, wiry man of unpretending exterior.

"What is your business here, sir?" demanded Johnson, rudely.

"Are you the owner of this house?" asked Benjamin Baker, coolly.

"Yes. That does not explain your presence here, however."

"I am in search of a quiet home, and it struck me that this was about the sort of house I would like," answered Baker.

"Then, sir, you have wasted your time in coming here. This house is not for sale."

"Indeed! Perhaps I may offer you enough to make it worth your while to sell it to me."

"Quite impossible, sir. This is my house, and I don't want to sell."

"I am sorry to hear it. Perhaps you would be kind enough to show me over the house, to let me see its arrangements, as I may wish to copy them if I build?"

"It strikes me, sir, you are very curious, whoever you are," said Johnson, angrily. "You intrude yourself into the house of a private citizen and wish to pry into his private arrangements."

"I really beg your pardon, Mr.—— I really forget your name."

"Because you never heard it. The name is of no consequence."

"I was about to say, if you have anything to conceal, I won't press my request."

"Who told you I had anything to conceal?" said Johnson, suspiciously.

"I inferred it from your evident reluctance to let me go over your house."

"Then, sir, I have only to say that you are mistaken. Because I resent your impertinent intrusion, you jump to the conclusion that I have something to conceal."

"Just so. There might, for example, be a trap-door in this very room——"

Colonel Johnson sprang to his feet and advanced toward his unwelcome guest.

"Tell me what you mean," he said savagely. "I am not the man to be bearded in my own house."

You will yet repent your temerity in thrusting yourself here."

Benjamin Baker also rose to his feet, and, putting a whistle to his mouth, whistled shrilly.

Instantly two stalwart policemen sprang into the apartment from the hall outside.

"Seize that man!" said the detective.

"What does this mean?" asked Johnson, struggling, but ineffectually.

"It means, Colonel Johnson, alias Robert Kidd, that you are arrested on a charge of being implicated in the attempt to steal a parcel of bonds belonging to the National Bank of Chester, Maine."

"I don't know anything about it," said Johnson, sullenly. "You've got the wrong man."

"Possibly. If so, you'll be released, especially as there are other charges against you. Guard him, men, while I search the house."

"Here, boy, show me where my young friend is concealed," said Baker to Daniel, who was timidly peeping in at the door.

A minute later and Baker cut the cords that confined the hands and feet of Grit.

"Now," said he quickly, "have you discovered anything that will be of service to me?"

Grit opened for him the dark passage. The detective walked to the end, and saw the room into which it opened.

"Do you know, Grit," he said, on his return, "you have done a splendid day's work? With your help I have discovered the headquarters of a bold and desperate gang of thieves which has long baffled the efforts of the Boston police. There is a standing reward of two thousand dollars for their discovery, to which you will be entitled."

"No, sir; it belongs to you," said Grit, modestly. "I could have done nothing without you."

"Nor I without your information. But we can discuss this hereafter."

Johnson ground his teeth when Grit was brought upstairs, free, to see him handcuffed and helpless.

"I believe you are at the bottom of this, you young rascal!" he said.

"You are right," said the detective. "We have received very valuable information from this boy, whom you supposed to be in your power."

"I wish I had killed him!" said Johnson, furiously.

"Fortunately you were saved that crime, and need expect nothing worse than a long term of imprisonment. Officers, take him along."

CHAPTER XLI

CONCLUSION

THE Boston and Portland papers of the next morning contained full accounts of the discovery of the rendezvous of a gang of robbers whose operations had been extensive in and near Boston, together with the arrest of their chief.

In the account full credit was given to our young hero, Grit, for his agency in the affair, and it was announced that the prize offered would be divided between Grit and the famous detective, Benjamin Baker.

It may readily be supposed that this account created great excitement in Chester. Most of the villagers were heartily pleased by the good fortune and sudden renown of the young boatman; but there was at least one household to which the news brought no satisfaction. This was the home of Phil Courtney.

"What a fuss the papers make about that boy!" exclaimed Phil, in disgust. "I suppose he will put on no end of airs when he gets home."

"Very likely," said Mr. Courtney. "He seems to have had good luck—that's all."

"It's pretty good luck to get a thousand dollars," said Phil, enviously. "Papa, will you do me a favor?"

"What is it?"

"Can't you put a thousand dollars in the bank for me, so that the boatman can't crow over me?"

"Money is very scarce with me just now, Philip," said his father. "It will do just as well to tell him you have a thousand dollars in my hands."

"I would rather have it in a bank," said Philip.

"Then you'll have to wait till it is convenient for me," said his father, shortly.

It was true that money was scarce with Mr. Courtney. I have already stated that he had been speculating in Wall Street heavily, and with by no means unvarying success. In fact, the same evening he received a letter from his brother stating that the market was so heavily against him that he must at once forward five thousand dollars to protect his margin, or the stocks carried on his account must be sold.

As Mr. Courtney was unable to meet this demand, the stocks were sold, involving a loss of ten thousand dollars.

This, in addition to previous losses, so far crippled Mr. Courtney that he was compelled mate-

rially to change his way of living, and Phil had to come down in the social scale, much to his mortification.

But the star of the young boatman was in the ascendant.

On his return to Pine Point he found Mr. Jackson, the New York broker, about to leave the hotel for a return to the city. He congratulated Grit on his success as an amateur detective, and then asked:

"What are your plans, Grit? Probably you won't care to remain a boatman?"

"No, sir. I have decided to give up that business, at any rate."

"Have you anything in view?"

"I thought I might get a situation of some kind in Boston. The prize-money will keep us going till I can earn a good salary."

"Will your mother move from Pine Point?"

"Yes, sir; she would be lonely here without me."

"I have an amendment to offer to your plans, Grit."

"What is that, sir?"

"Come to New York instead of Boston."

"I have no objection, sir, if there is any opening there for me."

"There is, and in my office. Do you think you would like to enter my office?"

"I should like it very much," said Grit, eagerly.

"Then I will engage you at a salary of twelve dollars per week—for the first year."

"Twelve dollars!" exclaimed Grit, overwhelmed. "I had no idea a green hand could get such pay."

"Nor can they," said Mr. Jackson, smiling; "but you remember that there is an unsettled account between us. I have not forgotten that you saved the life of my boy."

"I don't want any reward for that, sir."

"I appreciate your delicacy, but I shall feel better satisfied to recognize it in my own way. I have another proposal to make to you. It is this: Place in my hands as much of your thousand dollars as you can spare, and I will invest it carefully for your advantage in stock operations, and hope materially to increase it."

"I shall be delighted if you will do so, Mr. Jackson, and think myself very fortunate that you take this trouble for me."

"Now, how soon can you go to New York?"

"When you think best, sir."

"I advise you to go on with me and select a home for your mother. Then you can come back for her and settle yourself down to work."

A year later, in a pleasant cottage on Staten Island, Grit and his mother sat in a neatly furnished sitting-room. Our young hero was taller,

as befitted his increased age, but there was the same pleasant, frank expression which had characterized him as a boy.

"Mother," said he, "I have some news for you."

"What is it, Grit?"

"Mr. Jackson has raised my pay to twenty dollars a week."

"That is excellent news, Grit."

"He has, besides, rendered an account of the eight hundred dollars which he took from me to operate with. How much do you think it amounts to now?"

"Perhaps a thousand."

"Between four and five thousand!" answered Grit, in exultation.

"How can that be possible?" exclaimed Mrs. Morris, in astonishment.

"He used it as a margin to buy stocks, which advanced greatly in a short time. This, being repeated once or twice, has made me almost rich."

"I can hardly believe it, Grit. It is too good to be true."

"But it is true, mother. Now we can change our mode of living."

"Wait till you are worth ten thousand dollars, Grit—then I will consent. But I, too, have some news for you."

"What is it?"

"I had a letter from Chester to-day. Our old neighbor, Mr. Courtney, has lost everything—or almost everything—and has been compelled to accept the post of bank messenger, at a salary of fifty dollars per month."

"That is indeed a change," said Grit. "What will Phil do?"

"He has gone into a store in Chester, on a salary of three dollars a week."

"Poor fellow!" said Grit. "I pity him. It must be hard for a boy with his high notions to come down in the world so. I would rather begin small and rise, than be reared in affluence only to sink into poverty afterward."

It was quite true. The result of his rash speculations was to reduce Mr. Courtney to poverty and make him for the balance of his life a soured, discontented man.

As for Phil, he is still young, and adversity may teach him a valuable lesson. Still, I hardly think he will ever look with satisfaction upon the growing success and prosperity of the young boatman.

I must note another change. It will be observed that I have referred to Grit's mother as Mrs. Morris. Mr. Brandon was accidentally drowned in Portland Harbor, having undertaken, while under the influence of liquor, to row to Peake's Island, some two miles distant. His wife and Grit were

shocked by his sudden death, but they could hardly be expected to mourn for him. His widow resumed the name of her former husband, and could now lay aside all anxiety as to the quiet tenor of her life being broken in upon by her ill-chosen second husband.

It looks as if Grit's prosperity had come to stay. I am privately informed that Mr. Jackson intends next year to make him junior partner, and this will give him a high position in business circles. I am sure my young readers will feel that his prosperity has been well earned, and will rejoice heartily in the brilliant success of the young boatman of Pine Point.

THE END

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